



**SACKED TEST AND TRACE  
WORKER SPEAKS OUT**

**'WE HELD SHAMBOLIC SYSTEM TOGETHER >>PAGE 3**

**TORY CLAIM THEY'LL END NHS  
PRIVATISATION IS NONSENSE**

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**VACCINE STRATEGY IN DANGER**

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# Socialist Worker

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## NAPIER BARRACKS INMATE ASKS 'WHY ARE THEY PUNISHING US?'



Refugees protesting at the Napier Barracks camp near Folkestone, Kent

# TORIES' HELL FOR REFUGEES

**EXCLUSIVE  
'THIS PLACE  
IS NOT FIT TO  
HOUSE HUMAN  
BEINGS'**

**Pages 10&11**

### LABOUR

**Patriotism gives  
working class  
people nothing**

THERE ARE layers upon layers of dangerous lies behind Labour's turn towards nationalism under Keir Starmer.

The biggest lie is that this is something unifying and progressive. The most dangerous is that it's about identifying with working class people.

**>>Page 17**

### RUSSIA



**What's behind  
the protests  
against Putin?**

HUGE demonstrations in Russia are a challenge to Vladimir Putin.

They are a product of poverty, lack of democracy and inequality—and reflect decades of failures by neoliberal and Stalinist regimes. They deserve much better leadership than Alexei Navalny.

**>>Pages 14&15**

### STRIKE

**British Gas  
workers burn  
bad contracts**

BRITISH GAS workers burned their new, worse contracts at the weekend, as they took to the picket lines.

Over 7,000 British Gas strikers took their 15th day of strikes this year on Sunday. They are fighting plans to force through inferior contracts.

**>>Page 20**



## THE THINGS THEY SAY

**'Erecting a statue to honour Captain Sir Tom Moore might be tempting fate. I'd give it no more than a week before it would be attacked by Black Lives Matter headbangers'**

Columnist Richard Littlejohn finds an opportunity to attack people for taking down a statue that hasn't gone up

**'I need to call Philip just to let him know that I've been holding hands with another man before it hits the media'**

What Theresa May worried about after meeting Donald Trump in 2017

**'Squirrel careening through the traffic'**

How one US defence official described Trump's attention span

**'Illegal immigrants'**

The Daily Mail reports that people can be vaccinated regardless of immigration status—seizing the chance to call them 'illegal immigrants'



# Shrewsbury pickets fight on

**A CASE that saw trade unionists victimised by the bosses and the state in the 1970s went to the court of appeal last week.**

Among the 14 activists seeking to overturn their convictions was the actor Ricky Tomlinson, who was sentenced to two years imprisonment.

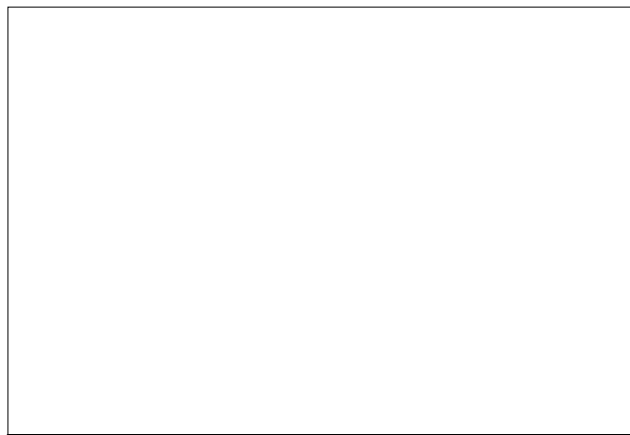
The 14 building workers were prosecuted for picketing during a national building workers' strike in 1972.

The trial was told that a covert government unit helped to get them convicted.

Declassified documents suggest that Edward Heath, the then Tory prime minister, personally approved of the unit's campaign to undermine left wing union militants.

The documents show that in 1973 the unit gave a dossier about activists to the makers of an ITV television programme.

This was broadcast during the prosecution of six of the men. Campaigners say it



Supporters of the Shrewsbury 24 campaign for justice

biased the jury. Heath's aide, Robert Armstrong, noted that a transcript of the programme had been shown to the prime minister.

He said Heath "commented that we want as much as possible of this sort of thing".

The trade unionists also argue that police destroyed witness statements and that this fact was not disclosed to lawyers defending the men.

In total, after three trials in 1972, 1973 and 1974, 22 workers were convicted of unlawful assembly, conspiracy to intimidate, and affray, while two were acquitted.

They were given sentences ranging from three years' jail time to four months' imprisonment suspended for two years.

"It was a politically motivated case designed to break

a very high level of workers' action at the time," Ricky told Socialist Worker. "This was the first, and still only, national building workers' strike."

"On 6 September 1972 when the so-called offences took place, the police said there would be no charges."

"Then the people at the top got involved and it all changed."

"Police and witness statements were destroyed and new ones prepared."

"The judge was a gobshite. People's lives were torn apart."

"My mate Dezzie Warren was sentenced to three years in jail and then given drugs which led to him getting Parkinson's disease."

Speaking to the court before he was sentenced, Des Warren said, "Was there a conspiracy?"

"Yes, there was. But not by the pickets. The conspiracy was one between the home secretary, the employers and the police."

**DEVOUT DUP MP Gregory Campbell** responded to black people singing about their love of god on Songs of Praise. "There were five singers, all of them black," he said. "There were three judges all of them black and one presenter who was incidentally, yes black. The singers were all very good but can you imagine an all white line up with an all white jury and presented by a white person? No I can't either."

Orange is the new black?

**THE QUEEN successfully lobbied** the government to keep her private wealth hidden.

Government memos show that the queen's private lawyer pressured ministers in 1973 over planned transparency legislation.

A clause was then added giving the government powers to exempt firms used by heads of state from the new legislation.

## Poor see 'staggering' hardship under virus

**THE SCALE** of the damage to poorer people's lives during the pandemic has been underlined by a new survey of 30,000 households in nine "low income" countries.

An average of 70 percent of those surveyed reported a drop in income in the early months of the virus's spread last year. Some 30 percent reported they had lost their jobs and 45 percent said they had missed or reduced meals.

The study came from researchers at the University of California in Berkeley, Yale University and Northwestern University, among others.

Already-poor people have suffered "staggering"



Poor people are now poorer

hardship and if the effects persist, tens of millions of already vulnerable households will be pushed into poverty, it warned.

Edward Miguel of Berkeley, a co-author of the study, described its findings as "dire".

"This isn't any old recession," he said. "Its depth and extent are something we have never seen in poor countries."

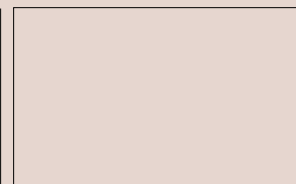
## Royals to the rescue in fight to protect the state

**BORIS Johnson's officials** came up with a brilliant scheme to reduce support for Scottish independence—send some royals to live there.

Last year they wanted prince Edward and his wife, the countess of Wessex, to move to Edinburgh.

Reports say, "The couple would have taken up full-time residence at Holyrood Palace, the Queen's official residence in Scotland, to lead efforts to increase the number of royal engagements there."

It might have come as a shock to Edward. Despite having the title



Can Wessex save the Union?

of Earl of Forfar as a 55th birthday present, Edward and his wife have lived in Bagshot Park in Surrey since their marriage in 1999.

Royals called Edward don't have a great record in Scotland. Edward II's army was defeated at Bannockburn in 1314.

## Have you tried password1234?

GERMAN prosecutors have confiscated £50 million worth of bitcoin from a fraudster.

There's only one problem—they can't unlock the money because he won't give them the password.

The man was sentenced to jail and has since served his term, maintaining his silence throughout.

"We asked him but he didn't say," prosecutor

Bitcoin—password protected

Sebastian Murer told Reuters news. "Perhaps he doesn't know."

The fraudster had been sentenced to more than two years in jail for covertly installing software on other computers to harness their power to "mine" or produce bitcoin.

When he went behind bars, his bitcoin stash would have been worth a fraction of the current value.

## Cop Tasers ill man nine times

A MET police officer has been given a final warning after tasing a man with mental distress nine times.

PC Rodney Chiweshe used the weapon, which delivers a high-voltage electric shock, during an arrest of the man.

The man was later sectioned under the Mental Health Act.

The warning means PC Chiweshe could be dismissed if he is found guilty of further misconduct.

The Independent Office for Police Cover-ups said, "The officer breached police professional standards of behaviour by his excessive use of the Taser."

It added, "The Taser is an important tool for police in helping officers respond to often dangerous and challenging situations."

A Met Police disciplinary panel concluded that five of PC Chiweshe's uses of the Taser during the arrest were not "necessary, proportionate or reasonable". Four were apparently OK though.

The man, who was tasered nine times in June 2019, was not charged with any offence.

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# ‘We held system together,’ says sacked Test and Trace worker

**A PRIVATE firm has fired hundreds of NHS Test and Trace workers despite warnings that the system should remain a vital part of controlling Covid-19.**

Outsourcing giant Sitel, and its vast array of subcontractors, last week told swathes of the organisation that their work would stop in just seven days.

Richard from Newcastle, who has worked for Test and Trace since October, is furious.

“We’re the people who’ve held this shambolic system together,” he told Socialist Worker.

“But a manager rang me and everyone from my group last week to read through a script giving us seven days’ notice.

“It made me really angry. Despite the massive failure of technology, we’re the ones who take the time to explain to elderly people that one of their friends or family has caught Covid-19 and that they must now self-isolate.

“And we explain what this means and how to get more help if they need it.

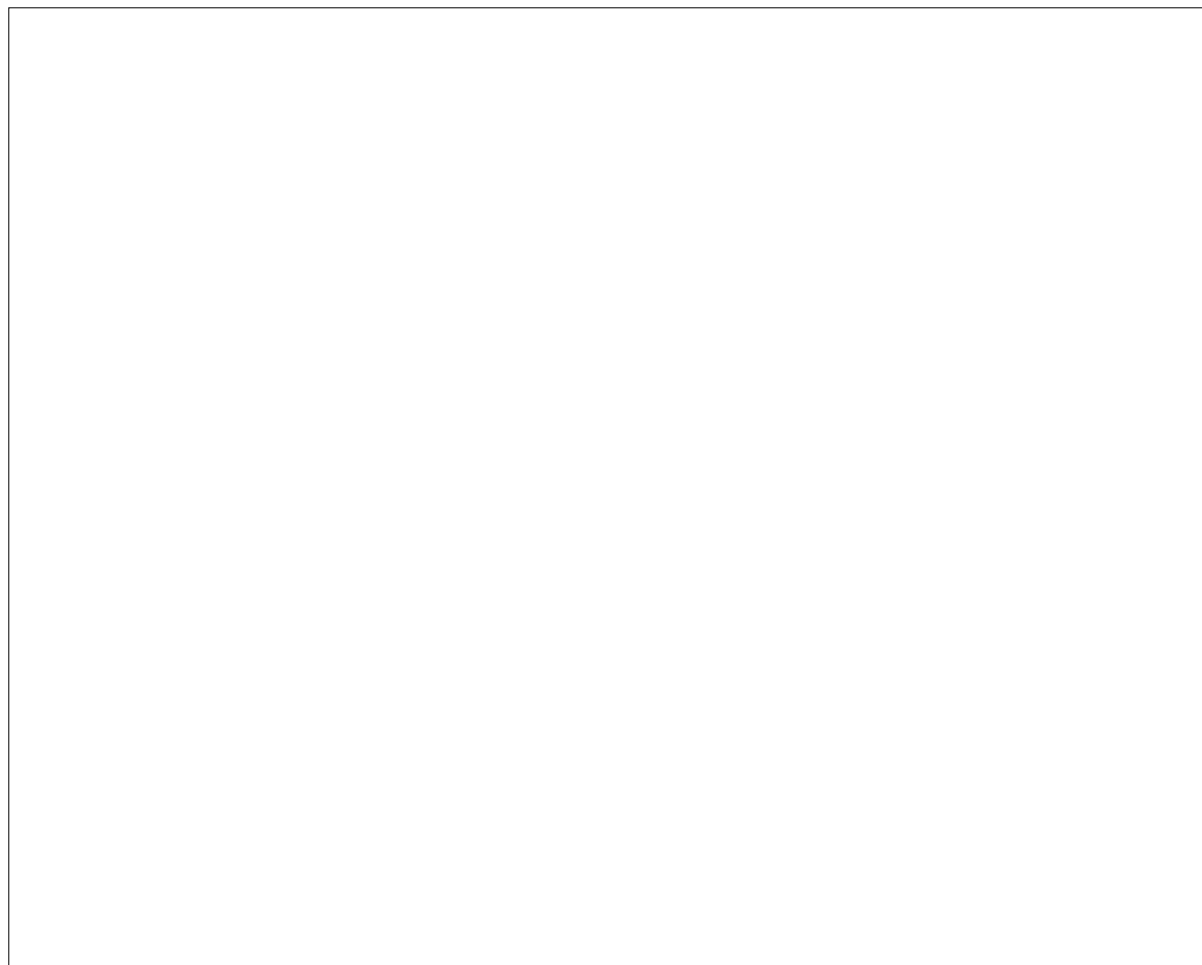
“We’re the ones who talk to the families of the bereaved, and inform their friends that they’ve had contact with someone who got the virus.”

## Positive

Richard worked in Test and Trace’s “Tier Three”. This means his calls were to people who’d had contact with someone who had tested positive for the virus.

He explained how he helped people being bullied by bosses into breaking isolation and returning to work.

“I’ve talked to people who work with disabled children when their employers have instructed them to return to work, and I’ve spoken to people who work for firms contracted to the NHS in similar circumstances,” he said. “I’ve been able to



**WORKERS WERE sacked by outsourcer Sitel**

tell them that their employer is breaking the law and that they need to use the isolation letters sent out or letters from their GPs to tell their managers that they’ve been instructed to self-isolate.

“If the employers don’t budge, I can escalate the case to the local authority, and that could mean legal proceedings.

“I’ve heard horror stories of employers who’ve told people

self-isolating not to give us the names of people they work with.

“All in a bid to keep their staff at work.”

Test and Trace staff have shown a massive commitment to a service they regard as vital, explained Richard.

“Lots of us have worked overtime but we’ve been treated so badly,” he said.

“Colleagues regularly go over their contracted hours to try and make

the system work.” He added, “A lot of the younger workers have not had much experience of bereavement and yet they’ve had to deal with so very much of it.

“The online training we had on death lasted about five minutes.”

The private firms profiting from Test and Trace have run the system into the ground before.

Now it seems they are ready to take the same risk again.

## Isolation ‘success’ is exaggerated

THE TEST and trace system, riddled with privatisation, has tried to justify its £22 billion budget by claiming credit for anyone who isolates with Covid-19.

The “R number” relates to the growth rate of Covid-19.

Test and Trace chair Dido Harding last week repeated to MPs her claim that test and trace had cut the R number by up to 0.6. She added it was on track to cut it by 0.8 in high prevalence areas.

But it has emerged that the boast is calculated by comparing the service’s impact with what would happen if no one self-isolated upon detecting



**Dido Harding**

symptoms of the virus. Some 90 percent of the service’s claimed cut in transmission comes from people who isolate as soon as they have symptoms.

This is before even coming into contact with the test and trace service.

This Detail was buried in test and trace’s own business plan.

Only the remaining 10 percent comes from those who isolate after being told they have a positive test.

The government’s own Sage committee of scientific advisers warned last October that test and trace was “having a marginal impact on transmission”.

It has urged more support for people to quarantine at home.

Harding was told off by Commons science and technology committee chair Greg Clark last week.

He slammed Harding for failing to publish the full statistical model that she was relying on to make her claims about cutting R.

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## Dodgy firm awarded contract

A COMPANY that was heavily criticised for its handling of another government contract was awarded work on the NHS Test and Trace programme by outsourcer Serco.

HGS UK was awarded the contact tracing role by the outsourcing giant during the early months of the NHS Test and Trace programme.

This was despite concerns that previously arose over its running of the Defence Solicitor Call Centre (DSCC).

But despite the criticism, Serco awarded the firm work

conducting contact tracing on behalf of England’s test and trace system.

The PoliticsHome website says that the contract with HGS UK ended in August last year after 6,000 staff were cut.

This followed criticism from some local authorities that the system was not reaching nearly enough contacts.

Since the firm took over the contract in 2019, it has faced repeated criticism, including from the Law Society, which accused it of presiding over a “meltdown”.

**A test and trace ad**





# Tories run aground on their own privatisation of the NHS

**NO ONE should trust Tory claims to be ending privatisation in the NHS.**

A leaked copy of the government's plans to "reform" the health service in the wake of the pandemic led to some far-fetched headlines last weekend.

The BBC declared that the forthcoming White Paper would wipe out market-driven changes brought in under Tory David Cameron and Labour prime minister Tony Blair.

Privatisation has spread like a virulent cancer through the health service over the last 25 years.

Some £9.2 billion of scarce NHS cash was spent on contracts with the private sector in 2019. Much of the money went into the pockets of companies such as Virgin Care and Care UK.

Thousands of vital workers are now employed by fly-by-night contractors that cut corners and put both patients and staff at risk.

Even if fewer new contracts are awarded in the future, their existing ones will allow them to carry on leaching for years to come.

The real reason for the Tories' new plans is that they want to bring the NHS firmly back under the control of the health secretary.

The NHS was given "operational independence" under 2012 reforms introduced by then-health secretary Andrew Lansley. He wanted each bit of the health service to function like a separate private firm.

But the pandemic has shown that, more than ever, we need a united and accountable health service.

## Brink

It is clear to all that there are far too few beds in hospitals. Even before coronavirus, intensive care units were on the brink of being overrun every winter.

It is also obvious that there are far too few doctors, nurses and other health professionals.

And the separation of local community health services, such as GP surgeries, from hospitals means many of the most vulnerable patients fall through gaps in the system. Sick people discharged from

## BACK STORY

**The push to sell off chunks of the NHS has been disastrous**

●The drive for privatisation in the health service began under Labour prime minister Tony Blair

●It continued under the Tories. Health secretary Andrew Lansley wanted each bit of the NHS to behave like a private firm

●Now the damage has forced the Tories to rethink their plans

●But they have spent billions on pushing privatisation through—and remain committed to it

hospital often find it impossible to get the right care once they are back at home.

What links these problems together is the way previous health reforms have forced different bits of the service to compete against each other.

Current health secretary Matt Hancock has found that the break-up of the NHS means it's impossible to get different parts of the service working together. That's something that has long been pointed out by NHS campaigners.

Hancock's solutions to these problems include creating "integrated care systems" that are supposed to unite all the different types of health care in an area.

## Supersized

But no one can be sure that these supersized bodies won't themselves be privatised. Ministers have already said they want local "captains of industry" to sit on their boards.

And the huge wave of health privatisation that has taken place during the pandemic is another reason to be sceptical.

The pandemic may have shown up health service privatisation to be completely irrational. But for the Tories, privatisation is in the blood.



## What's your story?

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CAMPAIGNERS HAVE spent years fighting against privatisation

# Damning care home report shows 'protective ring' promise was a lie

**TORY CLAIMS to have thrown a "protective ring around" care homes are in tatters after a report by the Care Quality Commission.**

Inspectors found serious failures in homes operated by hugely profitable chains during their site visits in January.

Nearly half were judged to be inadequate or in need of improvement—with mistakes at several leading to fatal outbreaks of Covid-19.

Some of the worst findings were discovered by reviewing CCTV footage from the homes.

It showed protective PPE equipment being wrongly used on 63 occasions in a single home and infected residents mixing in communal areas with those free of Covid-19.

The report also detailed serious staff shortages and a case of



Matt Hancock promised protection

a care home manager continuing to work even after showing coronavirus symptoms.

The result of these lapses was thousands of avoidable deaths.

In the week ending 22 January, 2,364 care home residents died with Covid-19 on their death certificate—the highest level since last May.

The firm Leicestershire County Care was among a number of chains that had multiple homes singled out for criticism.

It made a post-tax profit of over £2.2 million last year. But at its Curtis Weston House in Leicestershire inspectors found a series of failings. They included "no deep cleaning of bedrooms of Covid-19 positive people", ineffective alcohol-free hand sanitiser in use and staff

not always having ready access to PPE.

Care home bosses have long pleaded that they cannot afford to pay decent wages, despite being

desperately short of workers.

They have demanded ever more money to make homes safe and to allow patients discharged from hospital with Covid-19 to return to their homes.

But the scandal of the most recent wave of infections shows that cash from councils and government has simply helped to line shareholders' pockets.

It's more proof, if it were ever needed, that private firms cannot be trusted with the lives of the most vulnerable people.

Successful governments, both Labour and Tory, have pledged to "deal with the crisis" in social care but have backed away from taking action.

The only way to make care homes safe is for them to be brought back into the public sector. And workers should be paid at decent rates and with the same terms and conditions as the NHS.

There needs to be a massive investment in new, safer and more engaging homes—and the rich should pay for it.



A coronavirus patient in Khayelitsha hospital, South Africa

# Vaccine problems show defects of Tory strategy

NEW variants of coronavirus are making Tory plans for a rapid reopening of the economy ever more dangerous.

Many vaccine makers reported last week that their jabs are far less effective against the South African coronavirus mutation than the original virus.

AstraZeneca acknowledged that its vaccine will not protect people against mild to moderate Covid-19 illness.

## Protection

Pfizer and Moderna have also said the variant affects the level of protection of their vaccines too.

Shabir Madhi, professor of vaccinology at Witwatersrand university in South Africa, says the news should force a rethink.

"These findings recalibrate thinking about how to approach

the pandemic virus and shift the focus from the goal of herd immunity against transmission to the protection of all at-risk individuals in the population against severe disease," he said.

But government ministers here, under pressure from the Tory right, have spent recent weeks telling people of their plans to reopen schools. They have even talked of "vaccine passports" that will allow people to work and travel.

## Battle

The vaccination deficiencies show they must be used as part of a wider strategy that includes an extensive test and trace system. That's something Britain does not have (see page 3).

It also reveals that Tory claims to have "led the world" on a vaccination programme are a fraud.

Coronavirus mutations will

continue in all parts of the world where the virus is circulating.

Those countries hardest hit by the first wave, and those with only limited healthcare services, are incubating new variants.

Ministers who claimed victory by having bought-up vaccines early, then gleefully called other nations "slow", have peddled a myth that Britain will soon be immune.

## Battle

But it is likely that other versions of coronavirus will emerge and that vaccinations will be in a battle to catch up for some years to come.

The only way out of the cycle is to share the vaccines that are available across the world.

And the knowledge and technology should be freely available to every nation.

# Carers can't live off sick pay

CARE WORKERS are using their holiday entitlement when off sick with Covid-19 rather than try to scrape by on £96 a week sick pay.

This raises fears that poverty will force some to carry on working when they should be self-isolating.

Government policy says that employers must pay wages in full when staff are ill with coronavirus or are self-isolating.

But many say they have been forced to rely only on statutory sick pay. The Unison

union said it had been contacted by many workers complaining about the practice.

One affected care worker said, "You have a lot of women whose partners have lost their jobs so they really can't afford not to come in."

"There are people who don't want to work because they are scared, but they can't afford not to."

One firm, Bespoke Health and Social Care, admitted its staff received only statutory sick pay when off work. It

said the government only provided enough funding to pay one worker for an individual's care package.

"Low paid workers shouldn't be losing money they can ill afford when they're poorly or stopping home to avoid spreading the virus," said Gavin Edwards from Unison.

"The system isn't working."

"Every care worker who has to be off work during the pandemic must be paid their wages in full."

## Socialist Worker WHAT WE THINK

# MYANMAR—HOW CAN RESISTANCE WIN CHANGE?

**I**N THE last two years people have risen up repeatedly to challenge brutal regimes and inequality across the world. Such revolts have raised starkly the question of how to achieve real change.

The latest inspiring example of resistance comes from Myanmar, in south east Asia.

Hundreds of thousands of people have defied state forces and taken to the streets to oppose a military coup.

Last month Myanmar's military seized power and detained Aung San Suu Kyi and members of her party. The West has condemned the coup and the US has imposed sanctions on the country.

But Western rulers were silent while Suu Kyi's government oversaw the racist persecution of the Rohingya people.

The military is already reacting to the protests in Myanmar with violence. Troops have used tear gas, water cannons and mass arrests.

Protesters will need to resist the onslaught, and a key element of resistance is the working class.

Workers have the power not just to assemble in huge numbers but to collectively strangle the

source of profit. When workers stop, the whole of society shakes. That's why it was good to see the first signs of strikes this week.

Teachers, engineers and health workers have all joined the protests often marching to demonstrations in blocs.

And some sections of workers, including government staff and doctors, have called for a general strike.

Aye Misan, a nurse at a government hospital, told the media, "We health workers are leading this campaign to urge all government staff" to stop work.

"Our message to the public is that we aim to completely abolish this military regime and we have



**Politicians will seek to use the determination of protesters for their own ends**

# BORDER CURBS AND COVID

**B**ORIS JOHNSON bragged last week that, in terms of Covid-19 border controls, Britain has "one of the toughest regimes in the world".

It's certainly tough on refugees and migrants.

The Tories are using the pandemic to push for harsher immigration restrictions. Labour leader Keir Starmer agrees, saying we must "secure our borders".

But treating migrants as the problem encourages racism—and won't stop the spread of the virus.

The government says that anyone arriving in England must self-isolate for ten days. There is no support to help people do that.

It plans to begin quarantining new arrivals from 33 countries with certain coronavirus variants in hotels later this month. But again, they will receive no financial support—and could be forced to fork out up to £1,500 themselves.

Without proper funding, people face being put in hotels that aren't suitable for quarantine. Lack of support means low paid hotel

workers will feel pressured to keep working even if they are ill. Quarantine can only be a tiny part of any strategy to beat coronavirus.

One of the more transmissible new strains to emerge, B.1.1.7, was identified in Britain.

It's right to think about how quarantine can protect health.

But socialists and anti-racists should oppose all attempts to use these issues to push for a crackdown on immigration and more racist border controls.

## Breakfast in



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## ANALYSIS

ALEX CALLINICOS



## Myanmar is fought over by imperialists

**THE NEOLIBERAL imperialists who have returned to office in Washington with Joe Biden are finding the world has become more complicated since they left with Barack Obama four years ago.**

Most importantly, China plays hardball these days. Three days after Biden was inaugurated Chinese H-6 bombers were overheard simulating missile attacks. They were heard on the USS Theodore Roosevelt aircraft carrier as it sailed past Taiwan and into the South China Sea—an area that Beijing claims but Washington disputes.

When Obama became president he tried a “reset” in relations with Russia. But there has been no talk by the Biden administration about a reset with China. The new secretary of state Anthony Blinken had his first call with Yang Jiechi, China’s top foreign policy official.

He told Yang that Biden would hold China “accountable for its efforts to threaten stability in the Indo-Pacific ... and its undermining of the rules-based international system”. Biden himself says China will face “extreme competition” with the US.

Blinken also said that Beijing should condemn the coup in Myanmar. So far it has avoided any criticism of the army takeover. The news agency Xinhua rather absurdly referred to it as a “major cabinet reshuffle”.

But Myanmar is a complicated issue for both the US and China. Under the last military regime, the West backed Aung San Suu Kyi and the National League for Democracy (NLD). And China provided the army with crucial economic support.

But now Aung San Suu Kyi, once a global liberal hero, is tarnished by her defence of the military’s brutal expulsion of the Rohingya Muslim minority. Meanwhile the Myanmar army leadership have never been comfortable with their dependence on China.

According to the New York Times newspaper, “many of the generals spent their formative years battling communist rebels, who received generous, if covert, funding from Beijing. While ethnic insurgents are no longer part of the socialist brotherhood of that era, they still receive weapons and tactical support from China, according to senior members of ethnic armed groups.”

### Investor

One reason why the military decided to make a deal with the NLD was to pursue economic liberalisation that would make them less beholden to Beijing. The New York Times reports that, “while China remains Myanmar’s largest trading partner, its biggest foreign investor last year was Singapore. Japan, South Korea and Thailand have also poured money into the country, making it much less isolated than it was during the decades of military rule.”

Beijing made big efforts to cultivate Aung San Suu Kyi. “China has been pretty happy with the NLD government, and its friendly and positive stance toward Beijing,” Richard Horsey, an independent political analyst, told the Financial Times newspaper. “They know the military is much more suspicious of China and less inclined to a warm relationship, so this can’t have thrilled them.”

Myanmar’s strategic geographical position means that China will nevertheless stick with the new junta. Chinese president Xi Jinping visited the country in January 2020 and signed several deals. This included road and rail projects that are part of the Belt and Road Initiative designed to increase China’s access to the Indian Ocean.

Japan, a key US ally, has condemned the coup but doesn’t support the sanctions that the Biden administration is pushing for. A further complication for Biden is that his predecessor Donald Trump’s drive for “a complete decoupling from China” seems to have been a complete failure. “Despite a concerted effort by the Trump administration to reduce investment in China, holdings of Chinese securities by US investors have skyrocketed over the past several years,” investment advisor Nicholas Borst told the Financial Times.

Meanwhile, despite the pandemic, China attracted \$163 billion in foreign direct investment (FDI) last year. More than the \$134 billion that went to the US, becoming for the first time the world’s largest recipient of FDI. Washington is threatening “extreme competition” with its most important economic partner.



GRAFFITI DENOUNCING the new Brexit border

## Bigots in the DUP use Brexit to whip up vile sectarianism

by SIMON BASKETTER

**TORY BREXIT** and bigotry are making for a potentially dangerous situation in Northern Ireland.

The Northern Ireland Protocol was a last minute compromise to get Brexit through. It effectively creates a trade border down the Irish Sea—which Boris Johnson said would never happen.

But it allows free trade between Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic.

One consequence was that British companies had no idea how to export to Northern Ireland at the beginning of the year.

The bigots of the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) and their first minister have vowed to scrap the protocol. They are demanding the bringing in of Article 16 to move this customs border onto the island of Ireland.

The DUP is losing support in the polls so has moved to raise the border in an attempt to rally unionist backing.

The sectarianism that runs through Northern Irish politics is being stoked up—and that is dangerous.

The DUP’s Jeffrey Donaldson took to the airwaves for a particularly bizarre contribution. He said, “I wish someone could show me any other example in the world where you have this kind of border right down

the middle of a country, an internal border within a country that separates one part of the country from the other.”

He’d clearly missed the example of Ireland.

Then there was the incident of workers being threatened for implementing border checks.

Mid and East Antrim council withdrew environmental health workers from facilities at Larne Port last week. The move came after threatening graffiti directed at those carrying out new checks on goods arriving from Britain.

DUP mayor Peter Johnson cited “serious concerns” raised by trade unions over “increasing suspicious

activity” including the recording of number-plate details of staff members.

But the three unions representing the council workers—Nipsa, GMB and Unite—denied making the claims.

The graffiti did exist—the rest perhaps was some people trying to create a fact.

When the sectarian card is played there are consequences. The need to have large drug imports not checked by customs may strengthen Loyalist paramilitaries’ resolve against a border in the Irish Sea.

And there is something of a turf war going on among the Loyalists in Belfast.

A fair number went on a

march around the Pitt Park area of Belfast last week to show they were in control of the streets. The gentle response of their police escort suggests they had a point.

They also made a point of closing a community centre they didn’t like. Inside people were busy preparing food parcels for the very people the marchers claim to speak for.

The unions might not have raised the alarm last week, but it may take united action from workers to stop the drive to sectarianism.

### Got a story?

Email ideas to [reports@socialistworker.co.uk](mailto:reports@socialistworker.co.uk)

## Victim of loyalist atrocity arrested

**IN CONTRAST** to the policing of the Loyalists last week, a victim of the 1992 Sean Graham bookmakers atrocity was arrested.

Mark Sykes was detained after he and a small number of relatives gathered on Ormeau Road in Belfast for a private commemoration of the 29th anniversary.

His brother-in-law Peter Magee was one of five people killed when a Loyalist murder squad burst into the bookmakers and opened fire on 5 February

1992. The dead also included James Kennedy, Christy Doherty, William McManus and Jack Duffin.

Seven people were also injured in the attack, including Mark Sykes, who was shot seven times.

Mark said, “When I asked police what they were doing I was told that if I swore again I would be arrested.”

“I said this was a fucking disgrace as I walked away. The police then grabbed me and handcuffed me.

“The handcuffs were dug in tightly to the bullet wounds I suffered 29 years ago to the day.”

The assault rifle that was used in the attack was “lost” by the police.

But it turned up years later—in the Imperial War Museum.

Mark said, “On top of the insult of donating the weapon to shoot me to a museum, they have today literally rubbed the steel of their handcuffs as salt in my physical wounds.”



# Bailiffs are ‘putting our lives at risk’ say activists

People occupying tunnels in Euston against the HS2 project are resisting eviction, reports **Sophie Squire**

**ANTI-HS2 ACTIVISTS** who are occupying tunnels in a Euston park, in central London say that their lives are being put at risk.

Protesters began their occupation at the end of the last month in a bid to stop the green space being turned into a taxi rank and then sold on to the developers of HS2.

One protester, Larch Maxey, said bailiffs began drilling around a protester at the top of the system of tunnels while continuing to dig downwards.

Protesters inside say that digging a side shaft is “very dangerous”.

One video recorded by protesters shows an activist confronting a bailiff digging toward them. They ask, “Since you started digging the ceilings are starting to go, so can you tell me why you’re engaging in dangerous practices?”

Blue Sandford is one of those occupying the tunnels. She said that bailiffs are “destroying the structural integrity of the tunnels” in their attempts to evict protesters.

Blue warned that the bailiffs’ actions could “cause major collapse”.

Two of the nine activists left the tunnels over the weekend. Lazer Sandford left after enduring 30 hours with his arm inside a concrete block that prevented bailiffs removing the other protesters.

In a video released last Friday Lazer is heard saying, “A bailiff has been sitting on me for at least an hour. I’m finding it incredibly uncomfortable as you can imagine.”

“It would be nice if he could get off me.”

## Arrested

After leaving the tunnel, Lazer was quickly arrested by cops.

On his departure he said, “Eleven days in a tunnel and 30 hours in a lock on were painful, but that’s nothing compared with the current and coming suffering caused by the climate and ecological emergency.”

“The choice we face is whether to sacrifice other people’s lives for our own comfort.”

## BACK STORY

**Protesters are occupying tunnels under Euston Square Gardens in central London**

- They secretly dug 100 feet of tunnels over months in a bid to block the HS2 rail project
- Activists in tunnels say bailiffs’ attempts to remove them put safety at risk
- A high court judge last week rejected an application for an injunction to stop the evictions
- Constructing HS2 will lead to massive destruction of wildlife

A 17 year old woman also left the tunnels saying that she felt unwell. She too was arrested as soon as she left.

Last week a high court judge threw out an application put forward by Larch Maxey for an injunction to stop protesters from being evicted on safety grounds.

And the chair of HS2, Allan Cook, resigned from his position last week.

Despite weak mobile signals in the depths of the tunnels, protesters have been able to communicate about what life is like underground.

One said that despite everything those inside the tunnels are still managing to “keep their spirits up”.

The occupiers are right to resist a project that will harm the environment.

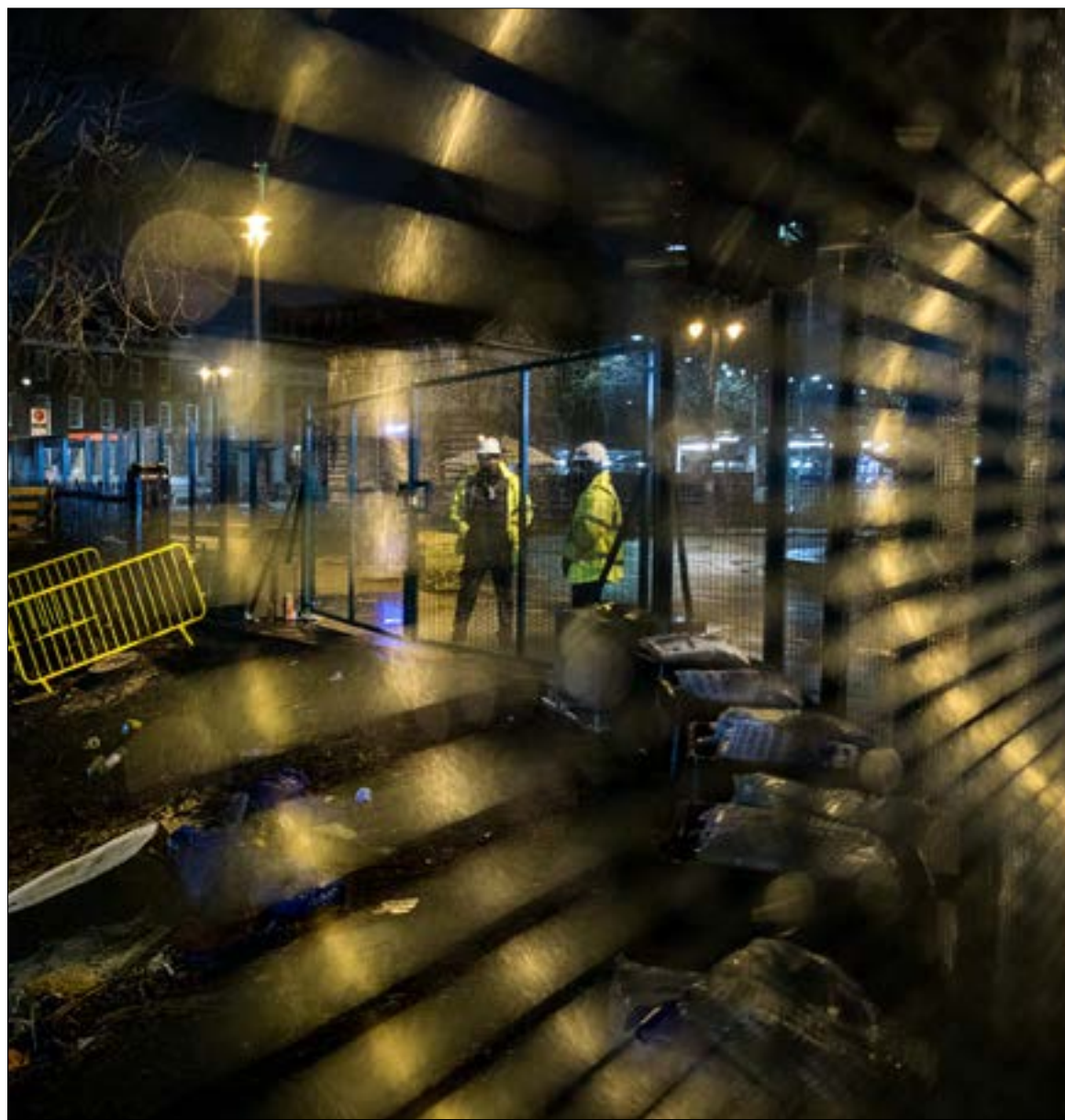
A survey on the impact of the construction of the high speed railway found that it could lead to the destruction of 693 local wildlife sites and 33 sites of special scientific interest.

The activists inside the tunnels and out are making a brave stand against the deeply damaging project that is HS2.



## On other pages...

What the Shrewsbury pickets case reveals about the state >>> **Page 2**



THE SITE of the occupation in Euston, central London

PICTURE: GUY SMALLMAN

# Investigation aims to label the left and protest movements ‘extremist’

THE GOVERNMENT has chosen a former Labour MP turned Lord to lead an investigation into “extremism on the far left”.

The independent review will be lead by John Woodcock—who now sits in the House of Lords as Lord Walney.

He has attacked Extinction Rebellion, The Black Lives Matter movement (BLM) and the Socialist Workers Party (SWP).

In an interview with the Telegraph newspaper, Woodcock said that Britain must “take notice” of the rise of the far right.

But he also said that the left has been “overstepping the mark into antisocial behaviour”.

He said, “We must be vigilant against a similar blind spot in Britain to the prospect of progressive extremism.”

## Violence

“That is the unacceptable disruption or even violence carried out in the name of progressive causes.”

Woodcock named Extinction Rebellion (XR) as being a group that oversteps this mark into “anti-social” behaviour.

His comments echo Tory home



It's not 'extreme' to fight racism

secretary Priti Patel’s claim that XR is made up of “eco crusaders turned criminals.”

It’s crucial to defend XR from such attacks. It has played a crucial role in highlighting the climate crisis and demanding action.

The issue that should be investigated is the lack of action over climate chaos that is destroying the Earth.

Woodcock also argues that BLM activists in Britain have “pushed a very hardline and absolutist view about defunding the police”.

He is deeply concerned with “left entryism” into broader movements, claiming that the SWP “has much more success

hijacking important causes and mainstream cultural activity than the far right”.

The real scandal is racism, not the political affiliations of those who resist it.

Woodcock wrongly said that the SWP infiltrated the BLM movement.

## Racism

The SWP supports BLM protests in the US, Britain and across the world. They are a welcome response to societies saturated with racism. The SWP has not sought to take over the movement.

Woodcock also targeted Unite Against Fascism (UAF).

He said that support from MPs for organisations such as UAF would increase “the risk that a far left minority could mire noble and essential movements for change in unacceptable violent tactic in the future”.

The SWP stands for a workers’ revolution to do away with capitalism, racism, poverty, women’s oppression, climate chaos and war.

This is not hidden—it’s a position that is included in Socialist Worker every week.



## IN BRIEF

## Resistance to government builds in Greece

STUDENTS, TEACHERS and health workers are building resistance to the right wing government of Kyriakos Mitsotakis.

Thousands of students and teachers protested in cities across Greece last Thursday against plans for a new 1,000-strong police force on university campuses.

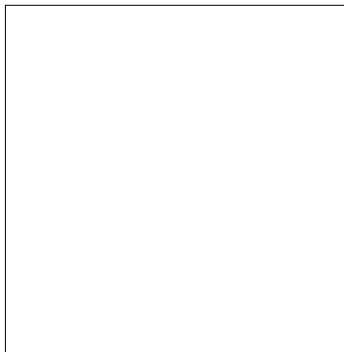
They also demanded that schools reopen with proper Covid-19 safety measures.

It followed a previous round of protests in January that defied a ban on demonstrations.

Meanwhile health workers are gearing up for a national strike set to take place on Tuesday of next week.

They are demanding benefits paid to workers in jobs classed as dangerous or unsafe.

They also want more funding for the health service, recruitment, and for temporary contracts to be made permanent.



Students and teachers in Athens

## Tunisian protest defies lockdowns

THOUSANDS OF people marched in the capital of Tunisia on Saturday—defying a police clampdown on protests in the city.

The demonstration in Tunis was the largest in a wave of protests this year against poverty, unemployment and police brutality.

Significantly, it was also backed by the major UGTT trade union.

Young people in some of the poorest neighbourhoods and towns across Tunisia, including in Tunis, have clashed with cops in protests that began in January.

More than 1,000 protesters have been arrested since protests began.

Riot cops set up cordons and roadblocks around the city centre on Saturday in an attempt to stop people gathering.

But the demonstration went ahead anyway.

# Bankers' and bosses' man is set to take over in Italy

by SIMON BASKETTER

**DURING A crisis for a capitalist state, sometimes a general appears on television to say they are taking charge. In Italy the process is a bit subtler—a banker has emerged to calm everything down.**

This is why Sergio Mattarella, the Italian head of state, asked Mario Draghi last Wednesday to take over as prime minister. Mattarella said, “Elections are not something the country can afford at the moment.”

Draghi is not just the bosses' banker—he is Europe's bosses' banker.

As European Central Bank president from 2011 to 2019, Draghi was seen as the saviour of the Euro currency union from a banking emergency.

The Covid-19 and economic crises are crashing into each other in Italy.

The bosses' solution is to push through austerity but they don't believe the elected politicians can do it.

The bosses like Draghi and most political parties sent out a general call of support for him.

### Attacks

Some of this is genuine. Much of it is to see if Draghi can push the attacks on workers that the bosses and the EU want.

The previous government under Giuseppe Conte feared losing support and encouraging its rivals if it launched full-scale attacks on workers.

To achieve a majority, Draghi

will almost certainly have to convince the anti-migrant far right League party, led by Matteo Salvini to support him.

Or the formerly anti-European Five Star Movement.

Salvini did not rule out supporting a Draghi government, but has also repeatedly called for a new general election.

Salvini's League and the fascist Brothers of Italy together are on 40 percent in polls.

Italy's centre former left Democratic Party is seen as likely

to support Draghi. So too is Italia Viva, a small party led by former prime minister Matteo Renzi—an Italian Keir Starmer with a bit more spine.

Silvio Berlusconi's Forza Italia may support Draghi.

The Five Star movement filled a vacuum campaigning in the 2010s against the corruption of the elite and on how out of touch the establishment was.

It quickly won a quarter of all votes. Within five years it joined with the far right League to form a

government.

Five Star then joined with the social democrats to prop them up. If it does it a third time and supports a bankers' government they will probably split.

Draghi is vulnerable both to organised workers but also to politicians building a base including on the far right.

Workers' action to fill the vacuum, rather than another populist, is the only route to defending workers against the crisis and the bosses.

**PRESIDENT SERGIO Mattarella (left) has asked Mario Draghi to form a government**

## INDIA

## Farmers continue fight

INDIAN FARMERS revived their struggle against the hard right government of Narendra Modi last week with a day of road blockades.

Peasant organisations issued the call across India, except the capital New Delhi, and hundreds of thousands responded by blocking highways for hours.

Police had earlier erected huge concrete barriers around farmers' camps on the outskirts of Delhi.

They also ordered the arrest of several senior trade union and farmers' leaders who were central to organising a rally in the capital.

While farmers show no sign of backing down, the trade union reinforcements have yet to arrive.

Millions of Indian workers live in fear of losing their jobs, surviving poverty pay, and the privatisation of their industries.

They are natural allies of the farmers and struck together last November.

So far the union leaders are content to utter warm words but otherwise sit tight.

Many are placing their hopes in state elections taking place now, and a general election that is years away.

But both the main coalitions, one led by the BJP and the other by Congress, are committed to “reforming” agriculture.

This will force the poorest farmers to give up their land to agribusiness.

Only a united fight by farmers and workers can put an end to their plans.

## TURKEY

## Students ‘won’t back down’

STUDENT PROTESTS have swept across Turkey, beginning at Istanbul's Bogazici university. They could develop into the biggest revolt by young people since the Gezi Park protests of 2013.

In early January president Recep Tayyip Erdogan announced the appointment of Melih Bulu, a failed ruling party candidate, as the new head of the university.

Students addressed an open letter to the president.

“This appointment makes anyone who has even the tiniest sense of justice revolt with indignation,” it said.

“Your attempts to pack our university with your own political militants is the symptom of the political crisis that you have fallen into. Do not mistake us for those who obey you unconditionally.

“You are not a sultan, and we

are not your subjects.”

Hundreds of students from Bogazici have been arrested as they have joined demonstrations.

Battles escalated sharply over the past week as the government seized artwork with LGBT+ flags displayed at a student exhibition.

Erdogan said there was “no such thing” as LGBT+ in a “moral” country such as Turkey and called the protesters “terrorists”.

Ece Sevik, who is in her third year at Bogazici, said “there are Muslims, atheists, conservatives, secularists” taking part in the demonstrations.

“We absolutely will not back down,” she insisted. “We’ll continue until we have a rector chosen through an election and Melih Bulu is gone.”

Sign a petition in solidarity with students at [bit.ly/BackBogazici](https://bit.ly/BackBogazici)



## Wrong on India act?

SOCIALIST Worker sympathised a bit too much with Indian farmers who raised the Sikh flag over the Red Fort in Delhi on 26 January.

Even the man who led the action, Deep Sidhu, has said he thinks it was “a police trap”. Leaders of the only small farmers’ union to support the action have dissociated themselves. All the other farmers’ Sikh leaders have condemned it.

Throughout Punjab many village committees have passed resolutions to dissociate from people who were involved.

The plan had been forged by a group of Khalistanis, Sikh separatist extremists, from abroad.

They offered anyone who would carry out such an action a quarter of a million dollars and permanent residence in Canada.

There was scant security and protesters pushed through the police line with ease. After some hours the Rapid Action Force arrived to clear the fort with considerable violence.

The idea of invading the Red Fort struck a chord with many youth.

But it was a calculated move by Modi to sow divisions between Sikhs and Hindus, and deliver a hammer blow to the campaign.

He has miscalculated. Thousands of farmers have returned. Their slogans are, “We are not Sikhs, Hindus or Muslims, but farmers!”

And all meetings start with loud shouts filling the air, “Sikhs, Hindus, Muslims, Christians are brothers!”

**Balwinder Rana**

From Punjabi farmer background



ILLUSTRATION: TIM SANDERS

## Individual acts on safety can become collective resistance

THANKS FOR printing my letter on the NEU union’s groundbreaking advice to teachers to use Section 44 of the 1996 Employment Rights Act to refuse to work because of Covid-19 (Letters, 27 January).

In the process, you cut out my critical point that the union had “collectivised” this individual right.

Individual employment rights are usually difficult to enforce individually. They require collective organisation behind you.

In this case the NEU provided its members with a “model letter” to send to their school head. The union also wrote direct to schools explaining why they were unsafe.

Some socialists might feel uncomfortable in relying on such individual actions. We don’t look to the law to solve workers’

problems. But it would be foolish not to exploit it to our collective advantage when we can.

After all, when unions ballot for industrial action, we encourage members to vote—despite this being done individually through the post and not in a meeting.

**Dave Lyddon**  
Keele

● DAVE LYDDON is right to emphasise the importance of workers exercising their legal right to refuse dangerous work (Letters, 27 January).

It is also true that this right originated in the European Framework Directive of 1989.

But the decades of “non-use” noted by Dave stems from a much greater scandal.

Margaret Thatcher’s government was required to implement the

directive by 1992. But the only type of regulation that Thatcher wanted was the anti-union variety.

So some were delayed and key sections removed. This included the explicit duty on employers to control serious risks identified by statutory risk assessments.

The Tories were eventually forced to concede the right to refuse dangerous work.

However they introduced it as a minor clause in the little known Section 44.1 (d) and (e) of the 1996 Employment Rights Act.

Even today they do not specify the right of workers to stop the job on the grounds of safety or health. Over these years, thousands of workers have been killed, injured or made sick by workplace hazards.

**John Murphy**  
Stockport

## Mental health ‘reform’ leaves people at risk

THE MENTAL Health Act (MHA) White Paper aims to improve mental health services by reforming the MHA 1983.

That sounds good, doesn’t it?

But the White Paper fails to address the root and branch reforms needed.

Acute mental distress and trauma is most often caused by poverty, housing problems, disadvantage, abuse and discrimination.

These are all worsened by neoliberalism—and now by Covid-19. Yet the White

Paper still treats such distress and trauma as “something wrong with your brain”.

This still allows you to be forcibly detained in hospital.

Safety? No one else is detained because of potential risk—and we frequently leave hospital still more traumatised. Please support our campaign for full human rights.

**Dorothy Gould**  
By email

Get involved with the campaign—email [liberationrights@gmail.com](mailto:liberationrights@gmail.com)

## Floods—climate chaos won’t ignore us

THE FLOODING of a large part of the village of Skewen in South Wales was a devastating event with eight streets flooded and scores of homes wrecked by the raging torrent.

A river of orange water poured out of the old Skewen Main mine on Drymau Mountain which stands over the village.

Drymau is riddled with old mine workings although the mine was closed in 1928. It will cost millions to repair the homes, roads and drains and millions more to cap the flow and direct the water to safer channels.



Residents face at least six months before being allowed back into their homes.

They have basically paid for the failure to ensure the mine in the mountain was made safe against flooding. The flood is the first on

this scale in almost a hundred years. It shows that, although the government can ignore climate chaos, the climate chaos will not ignore us.

**Huw Pudner**  
Pontardawe, former Skewen resident

Just a thought...

## Open books at universities

TIME FOR students to hold university managers to account and demand to see their financial statements since lockdown.

Universities will be flush with surplus cash because for a year they have been charging students full fees but delivering online courses.

Millions of pounds from energy, student services and so on will have been pocketed from closing campuses and furloughing staff.

**Aria Davis**  
Stockport

## A brutal war on claimants

THIS IS what this right wing government wanted all along (Attacks on benefits have toll on mental health, 3 February).

Their next step will be food vouchers instead of cash and workhouse style hostels for homeless and destitute.

**Thomas Ness**  
On Facebook

## Fury at British Gas attacks

ANOTHER big organisation acting with impunity (British Gas workers return to strikes, 28 January).

Look after your staff. If you don’t, I will be switching my supplier.

**Chris Szabo-Hemmings**  
On Facebook

● IT IS unbelievable that these shortsighted practices are being used in this day and age.

British Gas is pursuing profit at the cost of its employees.

**Ted Watts**  
On Facebook

● WHAT A disgraceful way for British Gas to treat their workforce.

I am a longstanding Homecare customer but that is going to change.

**Janet Cummings**  
On Facebook

## It’s A Sin is worth a watch

GREAT series (It’s A Sin tells the hidden stories of the Aids crisis, 3 February).

It also reveals the heartbreaking schisms in families caused by ignorance and bigotry. Don’t miss this.

**Philip Foxe**  
On Facebook



The Tories have corralled hundreds of refugees into a disused army barracks in Kent. Darius told Isabel Ringrose about the appalling conditions inside the place that is ‘not suitable for a human being’

**I**T’S “LIKE a prison—but I believe prison is better. At least you know why you’re there and you receive basic needs.” This is what Darius, an asylum seeker forced to live in the dismal ex-army Napier Barracks in Folkestone, told Socialist Worker.

“I really want to be moved out from here,” he said. “It’s not a suitable place for a human being. I don’t need a house or a palace. I would just like a safe room that’s secure and reassurance that I have privacy and safety.”

Darius has been stuck in Napier for more than three months. He came to Britain in 2019 on a student visa.

“Something terrible happened in my home country Iran, which meant I couldn’t go back,” he explained. “I claimed asylum, now I’m here in Napier.”

Before being taken to the camp, Darius stayed in a hotel room in London for three weeks.

He was transferred but wasn’t told where he was going. “I asked the driver where he was taking me,” said Darius. But I didn’t get a response.

“I think they fear that if they informed people we were being brought here, we would escape. I wasn’t aware of anything until I saw a sign for Folkestone on the road. Then I realised I was coming here.”

Having heard about the camp on the news, Darius said he was “really frightened” about being taken there.

“I’d heard in the news that the camp did not have a good reputation,” he said. “But then I saw what it was like with my own eyes.

“It’s like a prison. There are fences all around, life is under control from when I wake up, and I can only go out if I’m allowed. It was really hard for the first two weeks. I was really depressed—it really affected me.

**Toilets**

“I had to sleep in one space next to eight other people. The hygiene was really poor with two toilets between us. I was asking myself—what have I done to deserve to live like this?”

Darius is in touch with the charity Migrant Help, which told him he would be in the camp for around a month. “I thought, one month I can bear,” he said. “But when I realised it was more it was really unbearable. It’s not right to keep 400 people in one place in these conditions.

“We’re not asked what we need or want. The camp is not a safe place for people who have suffered a lot in their own country and came here to seek asylum.”

Darius thinks the reason refugees are treated this way is due to racist, right wing policy.

He said this aims “to show asylum seekers all over Europe that the UK is not a hospitable and welcome place for them”.

“They’re using us as an advertisement to tell others that this place is not as generous as you think,” he explained.

“The Home Office sees us as criminals invading their country. They call us illegal immigrants. But how can we claim asylum legally?

“If your life is in danger, you are



escaping wars or repression, how can you go to an embassy, get a visa and book flights to get here? It’s not possible.

“We have suffered so many different things to come to a safe country. We wanted to save our lives and not fear persecution.”

But refugees are dumped in the barracks and abandoned—with no idea of how long for.

“Every day I wake up and have nothing to do,” said Darius. “There is no explanation or information from the private company in charge or the Home Office of what happens next.

“I’m in limbo. In a better place it would be a little more bearable. But bad and unsafe conditions mean it’s even more frustrating.

“I took care of myself for a year during the pandemic—I practised social distancing and wore a mask.

“I tested positive here and it’s not my fault. There are 400 people here. It’s unavoidable.”

Darius received no medical assistance after catching coronavirus. “I felt really fatigued, I had pain in my chest, head and ribs,” he said.

“I had a fever and was shivering at night—it was really awful. But I had no pain killers or vitamins. Before lockdown I could go out once a day for two hours. Now we’re not allowed because there’s positive cases inside.”

The refugees have been told they must isolate. But Darius is still sharing a room.

“They’ve said that all the residents have to isolate for ten days and take tests,” he said. “After that if there are no new cases, they will open the gates.

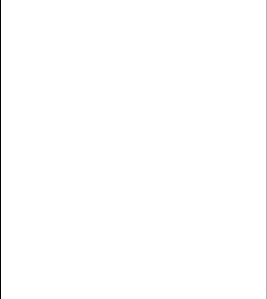
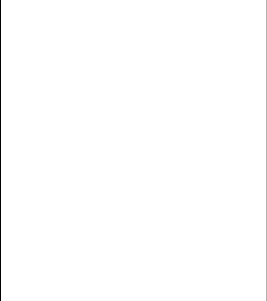
“In the block they’ve moved people out to make isolation possible. But I’m still in a block with five or six people.

“Three are positive and two are negative for coronavirus—so the virus can still spread.”

Darius is a pseudonym



**I’m in limbo. Bad and unsafe conditions are making it even more frustrating**



**NAPIER, the dilapidated former army barracks in Kent, now houses hundreds of asylum seekers (top) Local people have demonstrated outside to show their support for refugees (middle) Fire at the camp was a protest against the conditions (above) Home secretary Priti Patel (below) is whipping up racism to meet the Tories’ political needs**



‘Is Britain a country that protects human rights?’

REFUGEES IN Napier have not been passive victims of the Tories’ inhumane treatment—they’ve fought back.

They’ve had to, to try and be heard. “We have been protesting a lot since the camp opened,” said Darius. “We’ve been on hunger strikes. It’s frustrating when no one notices us. People become more frustrated and can lose control.”

Darius said some refugees have tried to kill themselves “because they can’t be here anymore”. Yet he said, “But nothing happened. It showed us the Home Office or other authorities didn’t really care about our situation.”

Following one protest last month, a fire broke out at the barracks. Darius said it was “inevitable”.

“The Home Office ignored us when we complained in a peaceful way,” he said. “All the staff and security left the camp. When the doctor left, I asked why. He said it was the camp manager’s decision as it was no longer safe.

“I asked how is it not safe for them but it is for us? He didn’t have an explanation.”

Darius said that refugees in the camp were “left completely



for two days following the fire.

“Those days were really horrible,” he said. “The police and guards were in charge of handing out food. Nothing else was provided. We had problems with electricity and water. It was unbelievable.

“I asked myself, are we really in the UK, in a country that protects human rights?

“They’ve now provided two generators for electricity. But the blocks need more than the generators provide.



**My friend finds it hard in a barracks. He was a soldier in the Iran-Iraq War**

“We had to drink from the tap in the toilet. They handed out bottled water and food from outside for the first time on Tuesday.”

Darius said asylum seekers have been traumatised by their treatment and by the fire.

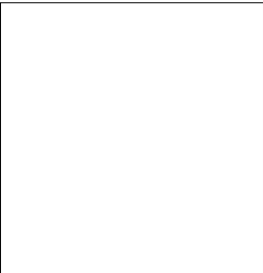
“My friend finds it hard being in a military barracks,” he said. “He was a soldier being in the war between Iran and Iraq. When the fire happened it hit him hard, it reminded him of war.”

Darius doesn’t expect to be vaccinated for coronavirus, despite the risks. And this is just one health concern for refugees in Napier.

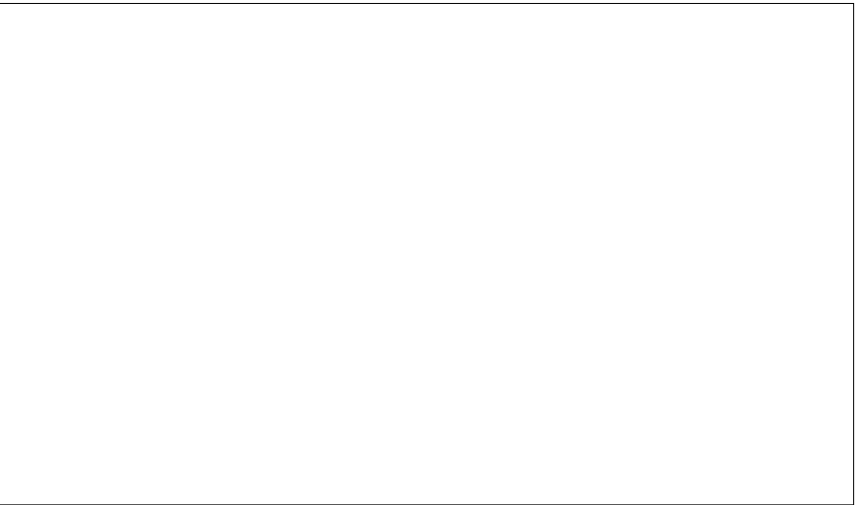
“A man tried to jump the fence twice to get out,” Darius explained. “The police aggressively forced him back inside the camp.

“I asked why he was doing this. He said had pain in his knees and because there was no doctor he wanted to see one. He was arrested. One of my friends had a toothache and couldn’t see a dentist.

“I got scabies. That’s what happens when you live with so many people. It took me a month to be treated and recover.”



**James Vyvyan-Robinson, director of Clearsprings (above) Asylum seekers protesting at being treated like criminals (right)**



Activists protested at Napier to say politicians have blood on their hands

Where does the money go?  
The great Clearsprings rip off

TORY HOME secretary Priti Patel disgracefully announced the Home Office would pursue legal action following the fire at Napier. Fourteen refugees have since been arrested.

“She is representing a xenophobic and racist side of the country which is not the majority of people,” Darius said.

“If she doesn’t know what the situation is, she’s ignorant. But if she knows and is denying it—it’s cruel.

“How can you sleep at night knowing there are people here from 20 to 60 at risk of getting Covid-19 with so many mental conditions? And you still blame us for what’s happened to us?”

Darius said there is a complete “lack of information” leaving refugees not knowing what’s going to happen next.

“We don’t know when we will be transferred or what is happening with our application process or when our interview will be held,” he said.

“We ask and the camp manager says they don’t know.”

Patel declared that the site was good enough for “our brave soldiers” and so it’s an insult to say it’s not good enough for refugees.

“It’s true the army was living here before us,” Darius said. “But this is their own home country, where they’ve probably got a cosy house and they’re getting paid for doing their service.

“And we’re living here during a pandemic, which the army didn’t. I bet the army would be able to leave here if they wanted.”

Asylum seekers are fleeing places where these same soldiers have carried out atrocities. Some

have escaped from poverty-stricken countries that are former British colonies. Refugees are then unwillingly forced into rundown barracks.

Patel reckons she is “fixing our broken asylum system”—but it’s the Tories who broke it.

She showed further disdain for the refugees after claiming the fire was “deeply offensive” to taxpayers. But the camp’s management Clearsprings is set to grab £1 billion over ten years from government contracts.

Clearsprings’ reputation in their hotels and camps is appalling. Refugees have reported lack of food and rodent infestations—so where is taxpayers’ money going?

**Prison-like**

“The Home Office must not forget people have been here for more than four months,” Darius added. “If we were allowed to work we could pay our own taxes.

“But being kept in a prison-like camp means you cannot work. I used to work before coming here. I was paying tax.

“They have put us in a place that affects us mentally and physically. It seems like a punishment. It’s really important to see people here as human beings, not prisoners or criminals.

“Some were psychologists, teachers, engineers—they can participate in society. Putting them in barracks wastes their knowledge and productivity.

“People are depressed. And they’ve been through difficulties to get here—they’ve suffered.

“So this is double punishment.”

Read more Socialist Worker

Tories pave way for more attacks on migrants

by Tomáš Tengely-Evans  
[bit.ly/moreattacks](https://bit.ly/moreattacks)

Most not in favour of reduced immigration says new poll

by Isabel Ringrose  
[bit.ly/newpolljan2021](https://bit.ly/newpolljan2021)

Leave to remain, but fight not over for asylum seeker

by Tomáš Tengely-Evans  
[bit.ly/Leavetoremain](https://bit.ly/Leavetoremain)

How cruel system deprives refugees

by Tomáš Tengely-Evans  
[bit.ly/cruelsystem](https://bit.ly/cruelsystem)



## WHAT WE STAND FOR

These are the core politics of the Socialist Workers Party.

## INDEPENDENT WORKING CLASS ACTION

Under capitalism workers' labour creates all profit. A socialist society can only be constructed when the working class seizes control of the means of production and democratically plans how they are used.

## REVOLUTION NOT REFORM

The present system cannot be patched up or reformed as the established Labour and trade union leaders say.

It has to be overthrown. Capitalism systematically degrades the natural world. Ending environmental crisis means creating a new society.

## THERE IS NO PARLIAMENTARY ROAD

The structures of the present parliament, army, police and judiciary cannot be taken over and used by the working class. They grew up under capitalism and are designed to protect the ruling class against the workers.

The working class needs an entirely different kind of state—a workers' state based upon councils of workers' delegates and a workers' militia.

At most parliamentary activity can be used to make propaganda against the present system.

Only the mass action of the workers themselves can destroy the system.

## INTERNATIONALISM

The struggle for socialism is part of a worldwide struggle. We campaign for solidarity with workers in other countries.

We oppose everything which turns workers from one country against those from other countries.

We oppose racism and imperialism. We oppose all immigration controls.

We support the right of black people and other oppressed groups to organise their own defence. We support all genuine national liberation movements.

The experience of Russia demonstrates that a socialist revolution cannot survive in isolation in one country.

In Russia the result was state capitalism, not socialism.

In Eastern Europe and China a similar system was later established by Stalinist parties. We support the struggle of workers in these countries against both private and state capitalism.

We are for real social, economic and political equality of women.

We are for an end to all forms of discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people.

We oppose discrimination against disabled people including those who experience mental distress.

We defend the right of believers to practise their religion without state interference.

## THE REVOLUTIONARY PARTY

To achieve socialism the most militant sections of the working class have to be organised into a revolutionary socialist party.

Such a party can only be built by activity in the mass organisations of the working class.

We have to prove in practice to other workers that reformist leaders and reformist ideas are opposed to their own interests.

We have to build a rank and file movement within the unions.

To join us, turn to page 16 or go to [www.swp.org.uk](http://www.swp.org.uk) or phone 020 7840 5602

# Socialist Workers Party online meetings

## LGBT+ history month



**BIRMINGHAM**  
Pamphlet launch: Pride Politics & Protest—A Revolutionary Guide to LGBT+ Politics  
Wed 24 Feb, 7pm  
281-634-5938

**BRIGHTON & HOVE**  
Pamphlet launch: Pride Politics & Protest—A Revolutionary Guide to LGBT+ Politics  
Thu 18 Feb, 6.30pm  
841-2142-3683

**COVENTRY**  
Pamphlet launch: Pride Politics & Protest—A Revolutionary Guide to LGBT+ Politics  
Wed 17 Feb, 7.30pm  
823-945-1917

**DUNDEE, ABERDEEN & PERTH**  
Pamphlet launch: Pride Politics & Protest—A Revolutionary Guide to LGBT+ Politics  
Wed 17 Feb, 7.30pm  
894-2628-7708

**EDINBURGH**  
The origins of LGBT+ oppression  
Wed 17 Feb, 7.30pm  
431-459-112

**EXETER**  
Pamphlet launch: Pride Politics & Protest—A Revolutionary Guide to LGBT+ Politics  
Thu 25 Feb, 7.30pm  
865-2972-2883

**HUDDERSFIELD**  
Pamphlet launch: Pride Politics & Protest—A Revolutionary Guide to LGBT+ Politics  
Wed 24 Feb, 6.30pm  
290-168-1804

**KENT**  
Pamphlet launch: Pride Politics & Protest—A Revolutionary Guide to LGBT+ Politics  
Thu 18 Feb, 8.15pm  
434-623-8064

**LEEDS**  
Pamphlet launch: Pride Politics & Protest—A Revolutionary Guide to LGBT+ Politics  
Thu 18 Feb, 7pm  
881-4770-0676

**LONDON: TOWER HAMLETS**  
The origins of LGBT+ oppression  
Wed 17 Feb, 7.30pm  
818-391-0420

**NEWCASTLE**  
Pamphlet launch: Pride Politics & Protest—A Revolutionary Guide to LGBT+ Politics  
Wed 24 Feb, 7pm  
368-595-2712

**OXFORD & THAMES VALLEY**  
The origins of LGBT+ oppression  
Wed 24 Feb, 7pm  
861-2001-6477

**SHEFFIELD & SOUTH YORKSHIRE**  
Pamphlet launch: Pride Politics & Protest—A Revolutionary Guide to LGBT+ Politics  
Thu 25 Feb, 7pm  
528-174-9278

**SOUTHAMPTON**  
The origins of LGBT+ oppression  
Wed 17 Feb, 7.30pm  
381-513-5080

**WALES**  
Pamphlet launch: Pride Politics & Protest—A Revolutionary Guide to LGBT+ Politics  
Thu 25 Feb, 7pm  
902-964-963

**WIGAN**  
Pamphlet launch: Pride Politics & Protest—A Revolutionary Guide to LGBT+ Politics  
Thu 25 Feb, 6.30pm  
872-5136-9540

**YORK & SCARBOROUGH**  
Pamphlet launch: Pride Politics & Protest—A Revolutionary Guide to LGBT+ Politics  
Wed 24 Feb, 6.30pm  
827-489-7492

**BIRMINGHAM**  
Climate change and coronavirus—why we need system change  
Wed 17 Feb, 7pm

281-634-5938

**BRADFORD**  
Indian workers and farmers—mass revolt against Modi  
Thu 18 Feb, 7pm

885-9187-7552

**BURNLEY & PENDLE**  
How education workers are fighting the pandemic  
Wed 17 Feb, 7.30pm  
856-0963-2675

**CAMBRIDGE**  
Big Pharma, the Tories and Covid-19—will the vaccine solve the crisis?  
Thu 18 Feb, 7.30pm  
681-800-4408

**CARDIFF**  
From Blair to Starmer—why won't Labour oppose the Tories?  
Wed 17 Feb, 7.30pm  
630-181-4857

**CHESTERFIELD**  
Big Pharma, the Tories and Covid-19—will the vaccine solve the crisis?  
Thu 18 Feb, 6.30pm  
829-532-8731

**EAST MIDLANDS**  
The Egyptian Revolution—why it matters ten years on  
Wed 17 Feb, 7pm  
354-874-4790

**EXETER**  
Can capitalism be free of racism?  
Thu 18 Feb, 7.30pm  
865-2972-2883

**GLASGOW**  
The dialectics of art  
Thu 18 Feb, 6.30pm  
851-5254-7239

**HARLOW**  
Women and the family under capitalism  
Thu 25 Feb, 7.30pm  
832-8746-7480

**HOME COUNTIES**  
The Egyptian Revolution—why it matters ten years on  
Thu 18 Feb, 5.30pm  
915-511-1297

**HUDDERSFIELD**  
How can Palestine be free?  
Wed 17 Feb, 6.30pm  
290-168-1804

**LANCASTER**  
Big Pharma, the Tories and Covid-19—will the vaccine solve the crisis?  
Thu 18 Feb, 7pm  
992-204-9372

**LIVERPOOL**  
The Egyptian Revolution—why it matters ten years on  
Wed 17 Feb, 7pm  
493-925-5919

**LONDON: HACKNEY**  
France, racism and Islamophobia  
Thu 18 Feb, 7.30pm  
798-534-2585

**LONDON: HARINGEY**  
Big Pharma, the Tories and Covid-19—will the vaccine solve the crisis?  
Wed 17 Feb, 7.30pm  
459-388-1576

**LONDON: ISLINGTON**  
Covid, job losses and pay cuts—can unions fight back?  
Thu 18 Feb, 7pm  
874-012-7970

**LONDON: NEWHAM**  
The Egyptian Revolution—why it matters ten years on  
Wed 17 Feb, 7.30pm  
288-098-8827

**LONDON: SOUTH**  
Palestine, Zionism and the struggle for liberation  
Wed 17 Feb, 7pm  
497-196-1801

**LONDON: SOUTH EAST**  
Rock Against Racism 40 years on—using culture to fight racism  
Thu 18 Feb, 7pm  
529-913-6390

**LONDON: WALTHAM FOREST**  
Eyewitness from Greece—how the Nazi Golden Dawn was beaten  
Wed 17 Feb, 7.30pm  
543-023-057

**LONDON: WEST AND NORTHWEST**  
The Egyptian Revolution—why it matters ten years on  
Thu 18 Feb, 7.30pm  
824-3598-9096

**MANCHESTER**  
When workers fight for their environment  
Wed 17 Feb, 7.15pm  
323-178-7151

**NEWCASTLE**  
The Egyptian Revolution—why it matters ten years on  
Wed 17 Feb, 7pm  
368-595-2712

**NORWICH**  
How would socialists deal with a pandemic?  
Wed 17 Feb, 7.30pm  
906-652-5299

**OXFORD & THAMES VALLEY**  
The Egyptian Revolution—why it matters ten years on  
Wed 17 Feb, 7pm  
861-2001-6477

**PORTSMOUTH**  
Big Pharma, the Tories and Covid-19—will the vaccine solve the crisis?  
Wed 17 Feb, 7.30pm  
488-934-2809

**SHEFFIELD & SOUTH YORKSHIRE**  
The Egyptian Revolution—why it matters ten years on  
Thu 18 Feb, 7pm  
528-174-9278

**SWANSEA & WEST WALES**  
The Egyptian Revolution—why it matters ten years on  
Thu 18 Feb, 7pm  
902-964-963

**WIGAN**  
When workers fight for their environment  
Thu 18 Feb, 7pm  
872-5136-9540

**WOLVERHAMPTON & WALSALL**  
Big Pharma, the Tories and Covid-19—can a vaccine solve the crisis?  
Wed 17 Feb, 7.30pm  
913 6646 7067

**YORK & SCARBOROUGH**  
The Egyptian Revolution—why it matters ten years on  
Wed 17 Feb, 7.30pm  
827-489-7492

The Socialist Workers Party is holding online meetings during the coronavirus crisis. This is to ensure that there can still be collective local discussion, organising and actions.

Most of the meetings will be held using the Zoom system. Download the Zoom app onto your phone or computer and just before the time given for your local meeting ask to "Join a meeting".

You can then enter the number printed on this page for the appropriate meeting. **The password for all meetings is 967537.**

Make sure you look at the SWP Facebook page [facebook.com/SocialistWorkersParty](https://facebook.com/SocialistWorkersParty) for news of national online meetings and other updates.



## CONTACT THE SWP

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London E16 9EJ



# White Tiger shows the brutal reality of class and power

This new Netflix film—about a servant in India who works his way to the top—has been compared to *Parasite*—with good reason, writes **Sophie Squire**

**THE WHITE TIGER** is a frantic yet darkly funny film about greed, poverty and class conflict in India in the early 2000s.

The film starts with a familiar premise. Balram Halwai (Adarsh Gourav) leaves behind his family and rural village to follow his aspirations.

His aspiration, it turns out, is to become the driver of the son of his family's landlord, Ashok (Rajkumar Rao). A job which he quickly gets.

But while working as a driver Balram begins to grapple with his position as a servant.

At the beginning of the film he describes being a servant as like being a "cockerel" in a cage before being slaughtered.

The cockerel knows what is going to happen to it but has no power to stop it.

And the film really pivots around that question. Can Balram be content feeling powerless as a servant or can he rise to a position of wealth and power?

## Strengths

One of the many strengths of this film is the way it shows how people of different classes relate with one another. How each other's lives feel alien.

Balram's employers speak about him as if he isn't there by his employers. They think he's stupid and blindly subservient.

When Ashok visits Balram's tiny room without windows he's surprised at the conditions that he lives in—despite being the one who pays for it.

For a large part of the film Balram is a very good servant. He even takes pride in it.

But as the film progresses Balram



**BALRAM HALWAI** works his way up from poverty

has to lie and take risks for the family he serves. His employers never repay his loyalty. If anything, his submission just leads them to exploit him more.

So it's easy to root and cheer for Balram at first as he cunningly manipulates his boss.

But as the film goes on Balram begins to become something much darker.

Comparisons have been drawn between *The White Tiger* and Bong

Joon Ho's masterpiece *Parasite*.

This comparison is somewhat warranted. Both films are centred around working class characters out for themselves in a world that's built for the rich.

Balram is willing to do anything to get ahead, even if that means ruining a fellow employee's life or abandoning his family.

And he accepts this as just the way the world is, even at one point saying, "rich men have the chance to

be good."

And really this film shows just how hard it is for anyone to escape their class position—and how that often the ascent to the top is often grubby and ruthless.

With great cinematography and a great soundtrack *The White Tiger* turns the rags to riches narrative on its head and transforms it into a capitalist nightmare.

*The White Tiger* is available now on Netflix

## A crime novel where the real drama is people's lives

### NOVEL

#### THE NIGHT HAWKS

Written by Elly Griffiths  
Out now

**THERE IS** a great cast of characters in *The Night Hawks*—and for many, you are kept guessing about their true natures.

It's the latest instalment in the Dr Ruth Galloway Mysteries by Elly Griffiths. This might sound like some awful twee collection of old-fashioned stories, but it isn't.

Galloway, a forensic archaeologist, lectures

at the local university and enjoys digging up old bones. But she is repeatedly called in to help the cops when more recent bones are uncovered.

You don't need to have read the rest of the series to enjoy this novel. Like many crime or thriller books, much is made of the cast and the setting. Descriptions of the Norfolk landscape are beautiful and desolate.

Sometimes the plot seems secondary to the real drama taking place in people's lives. You are

quickly pulled into the back stories of the characters and their conflicts.

The plot centres around a group of metal detectorists, the Night Hawks, who find a dead body on the beach. Soon afterwards two more

bodies are discovered at a farm house, in what appears to be a murder-suicide of the couple that lived there.

The reader learns more about the links between the various characters as the book progresses. There are many revelations that I didn't expect, particularly regarding the

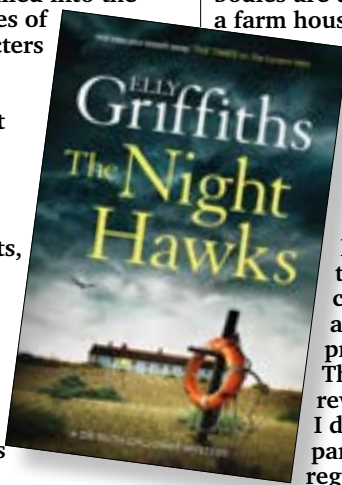
character of David, a new recruit of Ruth's.

There are also little details that help to show up how wrong stereotypes can be, especially with Michelle, wife of DCI Nelson.

Initially, I didn't feel as gripped with the storyline as I have been with other novels. But I became more interested largely because of how well-written the characters are.

And the fact that it has made me want to read the rest of the series is probably a good sign.

**Sadie Robinson**



### NOVEL

#### SLOUGH HOUSE

Written by Mick Herron  
Out now

**MICK HERRON'S** *Slough House* series of novels has deepened as it has gone along.

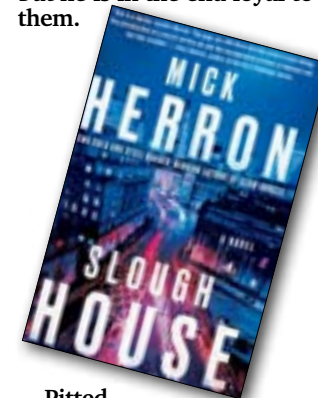
The dark cynicism of Jackson Lamb—one of the great spy characters—seeps into the whole narrative.

This, the seventh outing, sees right-wingers marching on the street and tech empires trying to buy into the state.

The buffoons at the top are happy to try and play with both for influence and power. Brexit looms over it all. The Russians are poisoning people and our spooks are shooting them.

In the meantime *Slough House*—MI5's London dump for demoted spies which is nowhere near Slough—has been erased from official records, and its members are dying.

Nasty, brutish and fat, Jackson nonetheless is ahead of every game. He can produce a cigarette, a gun or himself seemingly out of thin air. He berates and belittles his minions but he is in the end loyal to them.



**Pitted** against *Slough House* is *Regent's Park*, the headquarters of the Service. It can be said to operate under London Rules, whose first tenet is "cover your arse."

The contemporary references keep the satire level high, but the plotting and character are what actually keep the series going. Some of the background plots have been smouldering for a while. There are laugh out levels of dialogue and snark.

If you are new to the *Slough House* books dive in. Perhaps as mortality is high it is best to read the books in order.

The le Carre analogies that appear in most reviews over the years must get tedious for Herron. But here Herron riffs off them deliberately, gently and well.

And as Jackson Lamb says, "And remember, all of us are lying in the gutter. But some of you are circling the drain."

**Simon Basketter**



**T**HE mass protests in Russia are a product of poverty, lack of democracy and inequality under president Vladimir Putin.

A series of reports have shown that over the last 30 years Russia has become the most unequal country in the world.

A 2017 study found the richest 10 percent of Russians owned 87 percent of all the country's wealth, compared with 76 percent in the US.

The reality for ordinary Russians is soaring unemployment, rampant coronavirus, totally inadequate healthcare and falling wages.

And if they speak out or demonstrate they face harsh repression.

As Putin's popularity faded, new laws were passed last year cracking down on campaigning online, restricting protests even further and giving the police more powers.

Alexei Navalny has emerged as a central figure channelling opposition to Putin because of bitter battles inside the ruling class since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.

The end of the East European regimes was not a move from a type of socialism to capitalism. Since 1928 what existed in Russia was a new form of class society, state capitalism.

On the ruins of the defeat of the revolution of 1917, the state bureaucracy had become a new ruling class based on its control of the means of production.

So the move towards free market capitalism was a political reorganisation of the existing system, not a social revolution.

Chris Harman, then Socialist Worker editor, described the process as a "move sideways" from one form of capitalism to another. But the move to market capitalism from the late 1980s was used to hammer ordinary people.

### Neoliberal

Joseph Stiglitz was once the chief economist and vice president of the World Bank. But he later turned against the neoliberal assault on Russia.

He said, "The people were told that capitalism was going to bring new, unprecedented prosperity.

"In fact, it brought unprecedented poverty, indicated not only by a fall in living standards, but by decreasing life spans and enormous other social indicators showing a deterioration in the quality of life.

"The number of people in poverty in Russia rose to somewhere between 40 and 50 percent, with more than one out of two children living in families below the poverty line"

Boris Yeltsin was the first post-Soviet president. His rule

HUGE DEMONSTRATIONS in Russia reflect decades of growing inequality

# WHY THE PROTESTS IN RUSSIA?

Huge demonstrations in Russia are a challenge to Vladimir Putin's regime. They reflect decades of failures by neoliberal and Stalinist regimes—and deserve much better leadership

Alexei Navalny

balanced between three groups.

One group was made up of former KGB and security service personnel who still had central roles in government.

They distrusted Yeltsin as likely to sell out to the West. In return he tried to sideline them.

Another group had family or other close personal links to Yeltsin.

Some were close to the former regime figures but wanted to not be directly associated with them. A third group was the



**Navalny speaks for sections of the rich who have been 'left out' by Putin**

oligarchs who grabbed many of Russia's most lucrative business sectors. They profited as the "shock therapy" beggared tens of millions of ordinary people.

They gorged on the privatisations, sell-offs and general economic chaos that made bribery and looting possible for the most powerful.

Often they had links to the previous Communist regime but also looked to deal with Western multinationals and politicians. Take the example

of Oleg Deripaska, who at one time was Russia's richest man. In 2008 it was revealed that Peter Mandelson, Labour right winger and European Union commissioner, had met with Deripaska on his superyacht.

Mandelson was said to have given Deripaska trade concessions worth up to £50 million a year. George Osborne, then Tory shadow chancellor, also met Deripaska as did Andrew Feldman, the top Tory fundraiser.

The oligarchs were therefore partly enmeshed with the other Russian ruling elites, but also had separate interests. Putin, once he became president in 1999, did not trust them to follow his lead.

To consolidate his own power he began to clash with them and occasionally to liquidate them—financially or physically. It's one reason why some of them ended up living in London, which they dubbed "Moscow on Thames".

**N**AVALNY has emerged as a politician capable of falsely claiming to express some of the popular feeling against Putin. But he also speaks for sections of the rich who have been "left out" by Putin.

He has been through several political shifts.

Navalny began as a classic neoliberal demanding the market should be let rip, privatisation rammed through everywhere and workers' rights dismantled.

That wasn't very popular. So he rediscovered himself as a Russian nationalist. In 2006 he facilitated the annual "Russian March" which attracts antisemites, Islamophobes and fascists.

Protesters chant, "Russia for the Russians" and some speakers push homophobic and racist conspiracy theories. Swastikas were displayed on some of the demonstrations he supported.

In 2011 Navalny appeared in a video where he compared Muslim migrants to a "cockroach infestation".

But building support through nationalism and racism is a crowded field. The fascist Vladimir Zhirinovskiy came third in the last parliamentary elections and has substantial support for his vile programme.

And the state itself champions hatred of Muslims and minorities.

The 1999–2000 battle of Grozny, just as Putin took over the presidency, saw the total destruction of the Chechen capital. It was meant as a terrifying warning to Muslims who demanded independence from the Russian state.

More recently the state has set up or manipulated terror attacks as a way of demonising Muslims and justifying extra state powers.

During a wave of protests against Putin ten years ago,

Navalny discovered that more left wing ideas were popular.

He changed his pitch to the elastic concept of being "anti-corruption". Navalny also takes up issues such as pay rises for state workers and better pensions for all.

He is sometimes portrayed as a puppet of the West. Certainly Joe Biden has used the repression of recent protests to signal a more aggressive line against Russian than existed under Donald Trump.

Showing the traditional hypocrisy about democracy, the US state department rushed to condemn the attacks on Navalny's supporters.

### Nationalist

But Navalny is more than a front for the US and the Nato nuclear alliance. He can survive politically at the moment only by continuing to put forward Russian nationalist views.

The emergence of a genuine left opposition to Putin is complicated by the fake oppositions which have repeatedly emerged. They cluster around neoliberalism or a desire to return to Stalinism.

The last major set of protests was in 2011, the "snow revolution" that followed rigged parliamentary elections.

They featured three main leaders. One was Navalny.

Also prominent was Boris Nemtsov, who had been a key supporter of Yeltsin including being vice president in the 1990s. He then became an outspoken critic of Putin.

But his opposition was on the basis of a return to the early days of a free market tearing into people's lives—hardly an attractive programme.

Nemtsov was then assassinated in 2015 two days before a planned demonstration over the impact of the financial crisis in Russia and against Russian involvement in Ukraine's civil war.

Sergei Udaltsov played another important role. He is widely seen as the "left opposition" to Putin and heads the Vanguard of Red Youth.

But his leftism is a hankering for the old Soviet Union. Udaltsov poses with pictures of Stalin and defends the horrors of the 1930s, when all the gains of the 1917 revolution were wiped out.

It is the main parliamentary opposition to Putin, taking over 13 percent of the vote at the—highly controlled and

**While Vladimir Putin gets richer (top) more ordinary Russians face dire poverty (above). But there is resistance (below).**

corrupt—parliamentary election in 2016.

But it serves as an obstacle to the emergence of a real left. It generally props up Putin rather than opposing him. However sections of the Communists now seem ready to support Navalny.

The courageous protests in recent months deserve much better political representation than all the main forces that claim to be an opposition.

Neither reformed liberalism or a return to Stalinism will deliver what ordinary people need. The hope is that, as protesters take on Putin and his state thugs, more workers will be drawn into active opposition to the regime.

And that the real ideas of socialism and 1917 will be reborn on a mass scale.

## READ MORE

**Londongrad: From Russia with Cash: The Inside Story of the Oligarchs**

● by Mark Hollingsworth  
● £9.99

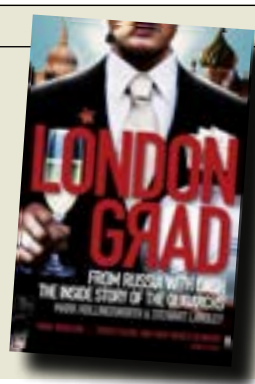
**Ukraine: imperialism, war and the left**

● International Socialism article by Rob Ferguson  
● bit.ly/UkraineISJ

**Belarus: revolt in the shadow of Stalinism**

● International Socialism article by Tomáš Tengely-Evans  
● bit.ly/BelarusISJ

**Available at Bookmarks, the socialist bookshop. Phone 020 7637 1848 or go to bookmarksbookshop.co.uk**



**EYEWITNESS MOSCOW**

## A letter from Russian socialists in the struggle

Protests have erupted in Russia following the arrest of Alexei Navalny. The **Socialist Tendency** in the Russian Federation provides news and analysis from the streets



THE SOCIALIST Tendency on the streets

with the state in the population as a whole.

This year, unlike in previous times, a wave of protest swept across the whole country. They've even involved regions far-flung from the two capitals and from other large cities such as Nizhny Novgorod, Kazan and Novosibirsk.

Of course, the two capitals continue to play a central role and that's where everything will be decided.

But the geographic spread of the protests may indicate that the regions are tired of fixation on them.

The protesters radicalised and began to push back against security forces.

On 23 January social media networks were flooded with videos showing snowballs being thrown at police, and of people beating law enforcement officers off detainees.

The most popular video showed a native of the Chechen republic, Said-Muhammad Dzhumayev, singlehandedly fighting several riot police at once.

This trend suggests that



**The regime is hanging on with the last of its strength**

people are learning to resist the regime. And they are ready to fight to the end while the liberal leaders of the protests urge them to go home and protest peacefully.

Another interesting feature is that many left movements, including our own group, Socialist Tendency, agreed on the need to go to these events to agitate.

We need to deepen them in favour of the struggle for workers' democracy.

These left movements have attempted to paint the protests red, and videos of the actions continue to be popular on social networks.

On 2 February Alexei Navalny's verdict was announced. It was precisely around him that the wave of protest formally unfolded.

He was jailed for two years and eight months.

Immediately after the verdict was announced, people again gathered in Moscow and St Petersburg to show their opposition to the term.

Despite the fact that the wave of protest has already declined, it is becoming more and more obvious that the regime is hanging on with the last of its strength.

And that its fall is inevitable.

The current government in Russia is only holding on due to the loyalty of its power structures.

It is no longer capable of influencing the bulk of the population ideologically.

Socialist Tendency's website (in Russian) is at [bit.ly/STRussia](http://bit.ly/STRussia)



## How the unity of revolt broke down old divides

by ISABEL RINGROSE

IN THE Egyptian Revolution oppressed groups were central to the struggle. Class anger unified people. Divisions on the lines of gender and religion were challenged.

Prior to the revolution sexual harassment against women was endemic in Egypt.

Hosni Mubarak's state used sexual assault against female activists. Women suffered verbal, physical and sexual abuse in public and in workplaces.

But this changed during the revolution.

Egyptian revolutionary socialist Gigi Ibrahim reported in Socialist Worker at the time.

She said, "From the beginning of the revolution, and throughout the 18 days I spent in Tahrir Square, I did not face sexual harassment once."

Tahrir Square during this period was, according to the women there, "the safest place in Egypt".

Women, men and children slept in tents next to strangers, sharing food and water.



COPTIC CHRISTIANS protect Muslims as they pray

Christians, Muslims, Jews and atheists, people wearing niqabs, hijabs or no religious coverings, stood in unity.

Coptic Christians were targets of state repression before the revolution.

At times during the revolution, the state tried to sow division by inciting attacks on them, their churches and their

homes. But ordinary Muslims and Christians stood together.

In Tahrir Square on 2 February 2011 Coptic Christians circled Muslim revolutionaries as they prayed to provide protection.

And Gigi said, "During the revolution women played a role equal to men—in fact, we played a pivotal role.

"Women were part of all the day-to-day organisation in Tahrir. We marched and fought the police, we faced tear gas and bullets."

Women ran checkpoints, acted as messengers and threw rocks at attackers.

Life during this period shows the potential of a liberated, socialist society.

But after Mubarak fell the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (Scaf) took over. They made sure to reassert their authority.

Sexual harassment was back on the streets and thugs targeted women at protests—assault was used as a weapon against the revolution.

And the Coptic minority were easier to attack than Muslims.

The military government tried to undermine the revolution.

But a brutal military attack on Coptic protesters was met with mass solidarity for Copts across the movement.

### Arrested

The Scaf government also stigmatised revolutionary women as "loose". Women who were arrested were stripped and given "virginity tests", often by men in front of others.

One woman, Samira Ibrahim, took a military doctor to court. The impact of her speaking out filled women with similar confidence to fight back.

Operation Anti Sexual Harassment was also

developed. Revolutionary members would attend protests and protect women who were threatened with assault.

When a video of Scaf soldiers beating a woman in December 2011 went viral, women of the revolution had a new symbol of resistance—the girl in the blue bra.

She was severely beaten and as soldiers dragged her away, they pulled her abaya from her body to reveal her bra underneath.

It was a symbol of how far the state would go to keep women off the streets.

But it became a rallying call of resistance. Thousands marched just days later across the country.

The counter-revolutionaries dragged backwards the progress made during the 18 days of protests.

But powerful memories of a different way of living remained.

The experience of the revolution armed people with the courage to fight, and showed the possibility for change.

This is part of a series of articles on Egypt in revolution. Read our coverage at [bit.ly/EgyptSW2021](http://bit.ly/EgyptSW2021)

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# Working class people will gain nothing from ‘patriotism’

In a recent party broadcast, Labour Party leader Keir Starmer appeared beside a Union Jack. Nick Clark examines why Labour hopes to gain from nationalism—and why it’s wrong

**THERE ARE layers upon layers of dangerous lies behind Labour’s turn towards nationalism under Keir Starmer.**

The biggest lie is that this is something unifying and progressive. The most dangerous is that it’s about identifying with the needs and demands of working class people.

For all the pretence that talking about “patriotism” shouldn’t be taken as a sop to racism and the right, it very clearly is.

Why else would Labour target areas where it thinks patriotism is an election-winning issue with adverts carrying the dog whistle message, “Britain is locked down. But the borders are still open. Any idea why?”

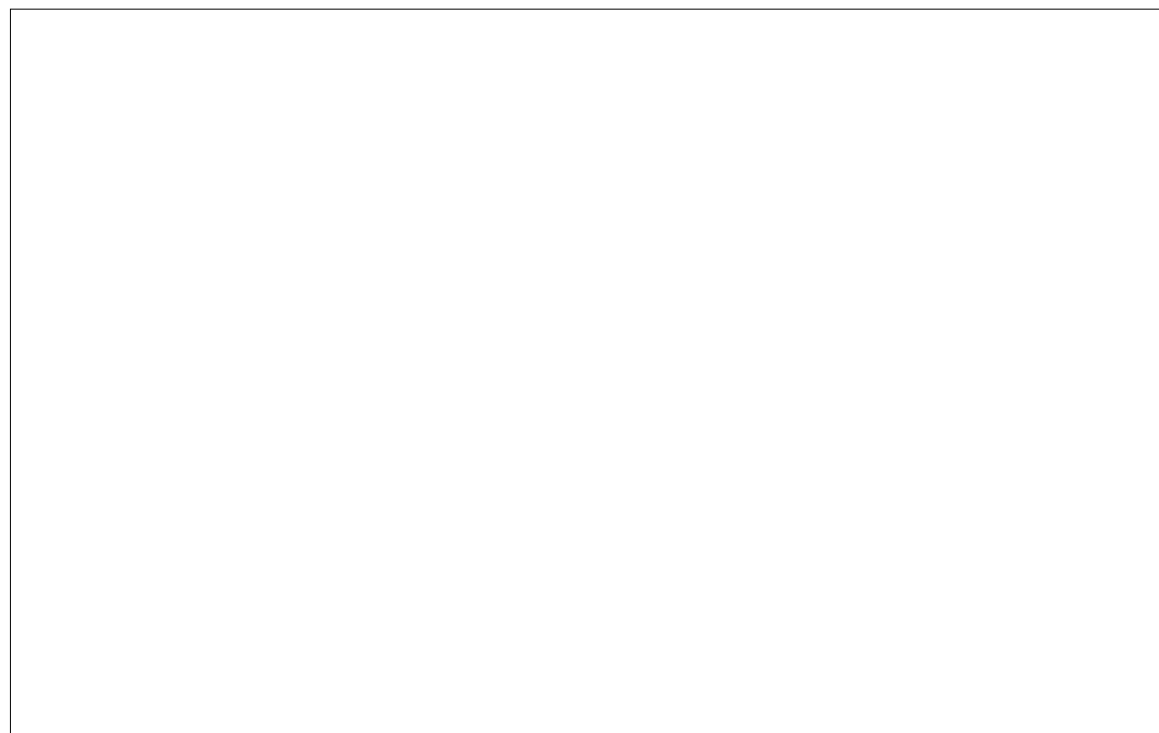
Labour has decided it lost the 2019 general election because it was too left wing—or that it wasn’t patriotic enough. So it’s out with anti-racism and being anti-war, and in with support for the cops, the army and border controls.

Even the people in focus groups used to justify Starmer’s strategy don’t mention patriotism or Britishness. Instead there’s a view that “Starmer needs to stop sitting on the fence.”

One ex-Labour voter from Grimsby thinks Labour “have left real people, taxpayers behind.”

And there’s a truth behind this. Working class people have been “left behind”—by all mainstream parties—for decades. But it’s nothing to do with nationality.

Industries have been closed, jobs slashed, wages driven down,



STARMER THE ‘patriot’ in front of the Union Jack

services privatised, and housing made expensive and insecure.

All that was made possible by a series of governments—Tory and Labour—that said this is how things should be. And it has meant misery for ordinary people, British or not—and a deep resentment that can be made to point in all sorts of directions.

So now it suits Labour to make that resentment a matter of patriotism and national identity.

Partly that’s because it helps its leaders to get away from class politics, and avoid talking about the real causes of people’s problems.

Partly it’s because they think it’s an easy way to pick up votes. As if by cloaking nationalism in progressive language, Labour can be all things to all people.

It only ever benefits the right.

It’s not surprising if some people buy into nationalistic ideas. For years politicians and the press

pumped out lies to scapegoat migrants and Muslims and justify wars, all dressed up in the language of nationalism.

And for most of those years, Labour played a grubby role in helping those lies along (see box).

Patriotism is the bread and butter that feeds the right. It encourages people to believe they have something in common with those at the top—and sets them against others at the bottom.

## Not all support ‘British values’

PLENTY OF Labour members and supporters are disgusted and horrified by the party’s turn to nationalism—and it’s not because they’re middle class or metropolitan.

There are huge sections of working class people for who “Britishness,” “patriotism” and “traditional values” really mean racism and violence.

You probably have less love for Britain if you’ve suffered at the hands of its cruel immigration system, or been targeted by racists wrapped in the Union Jack.

For most people in the world—and many people in Britain—British history is one of slavery, racism, Empire and war.

Even the notion of “British values” is a weapon. Politicians might say British values mean

## The racists win when Labour turn to nationalism

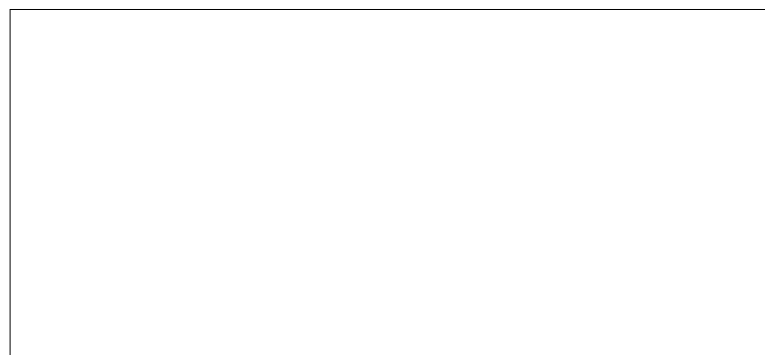
THE LABOUR right says the party can’t win without appealing to nationalism. But as Labour’s own recent history shows, the real winners are the racists.

Labour prime minister Gordon Brown adopted the slogan “British jobs for British workers” in 2007. The slogan then wormed its way into the trade union movement.

Derek Simpson, the then leader of the Unite union, took it up with backing from right wing rag the Daily Star in 2009.

It soon became a demand of some striking construction workers to blame migrant workers for poor conditions.

It didn’t help those workers. But the Nazis of the growing British National Party appreciated it—they used it as their campaign



The British National Party

slogan that year, confident that it was mainstream.

A few years later, Labour felt threatened by the rise of the racist Ukip party. Ed Miliband flirted with “Blue Labour” which championed

“family, faith and flag”.

Blue Labour’s founder, Maurice Glasman, said Labour had to come “together to forge a common good in their communities, workplaces and across the nation”.

What he really meant was that Labour should support a “complete ban on immigration” and bring the interests of racist English Defence League supporters “to the table”.

Labour didn’t benefit, but Ukip went on to some of its best ever election results.

Nationalism is the bread and butter that feeds the right. It encourages people to believe they have something in common with those at the top—and sets them against others at the bottom.

Starmer says patriotism “drives our movement.” That’s another lie—he knows that it divides us.



**What’s your story?**

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### Protest against nationalism

something vague like “fairness” or “openness.”

Then they demand migrants and Muslims show they believe British values by declaring their loyalty to Britain.

If you oppose Britain’s wars, you don’t like Britain’s border controls, or you don’t trust the cops, then you’re “anti-British” and you don’t like British values—especially if you’re Muslim.

Large numbers of working class black people, Muslims and migrants all look to Labour as something better than the naked racism of the Tories.

Starmer is treating those working class people with contempt.



**WORKERS' SAFETY**

## Study backs health staff PPE claims

A NEW study backs health workers' claims that they are still being put in danger by not having access to the best protective equipment.

The highest grade PPE masks, known as FFP3, is mostly reserved for intensive care units or for emergency treatment.

Staff working in other hospital areas, and performing routine care in ambulances, are issued with looser-fitting surgical masks.

Now a new study has backed their claim that they are at greater risk than health bosses think. It found that patients coughing makes health workers up to four times more likely to contract the virus than the general population.

And infection rates for those working on general wards are approximately double those of staff working in intensive care.

Staff in the groups Nurses United and NHS Workers Say No are demanding that everyone in the NHS immediately gets access to the right protection.

They said that "by working with basic PPE" they "are risking the safety of our patients and colleagues as well as of ourselves, our families and the wider community".

Unions at some local NHS trusts have already succeeded in getting PPE guidelines at their workplaces upgraded.

### Unions

And the GMB union nationally is backing the demand. It is vital that the big health unions move quickly to take it up too.

It is possible to fight over PPE and win.

Health workers at Homerton hospital in east London won the right to use higher grade PPE after a long-running campaign.

A Unison union member there told Socialist Worker, "We've been fighting over this since the beginning of the pandemic.

"Over time, we've presented more and more evidence to back up our case.

"We won some concessions early on when management agreed that staff could use FFP3 masks for patients where there was a significant risk of coughing.

"But these changes were dependent on that type of PPE actually being available—and it was at the discretion of individual staff, rather than a new policy.

"So, we carried on with our campaign. Finally, on New Year's Eve, management issued new guidance. And now there are sufficient supplies."

For a longer version of this article go to [bit.ly/PPE-study](https://bit.ly/PPE-study)

# New group could take the fight forward in Scotland

by BOB FOTHERINGHAM

**A NEW organisation, Now Scotland, was launched last weekend to campaign for Scottish independence. Over 1,500 people had joined by Sunday afternoon.**

Co-convenor George Kerevan told Socialist Worker, "The independence movement has long since spilled out beyond the Scottish National Party (SNP), so the movement needs an umbrella to unite it.

"It is obvious that there are deep tensions within the SNP over strategy and policy.

"Now Scotland wants to unite the movement in action and allow people to argue their separate political positions.

"One thing Now Scotland can do, because we don't have the baggage of a political party, is to reach out to the unions and even to Labour Party members.

"One of the main purposes of this is to allow the movement to discuss strategy. I personally think if Westminster refuses a referendum, then the issue of civil disobedience will be on the agenda."

### Dynamism

Charlotte Ahmed, who was elected to the interim National Committee, said, "We hope the new group brings energy and dynamism to the movement, encourages debate and pushes for more decisive action on the road to independence."

The Socialist Workers Party said, "There is now a consistent majority in Scotland who support independence. However, the SNP seems

incapable of making a serious push to achieve the break-up of the British state.

"At the heart of this paralysis lies the SNP's commitment to a neoliberal agenda, meaning any route to independence that threatens the status quo and upsets big business is ruled out.

"The creation of Now Scotland opens up the possibility of a new membership organisation, not controlled by the SNP hierarchy.

"Those who want to campaign for a radical alternative to the British state and to the limited vision of independence presented by the SNP leadership must seize the moment.

"To succeed, the campaign will need to be part of and learn from the energy of the movement against climate chaos, Black Lives Matter and link up with the social forces in society capable of confronting the British state, crucially trade unions and the organised working class.

"The movement should also seek to welcome and involve Labour members and voters. While we disagree on independence and how to fight for socialism, they are comrades in the struggle for a better society.

"In a clash between democratic rights and the intransigence of the British state, the Labour left must choose the right side.

"The need for a socialist transformation, which puts people before profit and confronts the reality of inequality, poverty, climate change, racism and the drive to war inherent in the current system has never been greater."

## Attacks on benefits take a terrible toll on mental health

**ATTACKS ON benefits have led to soaring mental health problems and more people taking their own lives.**

That's according to a new report for the Social Science & Medicine journal.

It carried out a review of 38 studies on the impact of social security policies on mental health in richer countries.

The report found a "clear pattern" of more generous social security policies being associated with improved mental health.

Yet "policies that reduce eligibility/generosity were related to worse mental health".

A myriad of attacks on benefits in Britain have caused "significant negative effects on mental health".

After housing benefit was capped in 2011 "the

prevalence of depression rose by around 10 percent".

Increasing the state pension age for women has "significantly increased" the chances of them becoming depressed.

The replacement of Incapacity Benefit with Employment and Support Allowance is "associated with a significant increase in the number of self-reported mental health problems and suicides".

More sanctions for Job Seekers Allowance claimants led to depression or anxiety.

And one study estimated that between 2013 and 2018, the introduction of Universal Credit "might have led to an additional 63,674 unemployed people experiencing psychological distress".

For a longer version of this article go to [bit.ly/mentalhealth-benefits](https://bit.ly/mentalhealth-benefits)



## DISTRIBUTION

# DHL strike deal, but don't trust bosses

by ISABEL RINGROSE

**DRIVERS AND** warehouse staff in Liverpool have ended their dispute with DHL. Bosses made an improved offer that was accepted by the strikers.

Unite union members have struck for ten days since December over low pay, victimisation of workers and a "complete breakdown of industrial relations".

Strikes were set to be held on Monday and Tuesday of this week, with more days expected to be announced.

But these have now been called off.

## Increase

Workers will receive a 3 percent pay increase for 2020, backdated to April last year. And they will receive a further 3 percent and £75 for 2021.

DHL has also committed to "ongoing outside influence to change the workplace culture and improve industrial relations".

Unite regional officer Kenny Rowe said, "Unite has taken at face value DHL's commitment to improve



PICKETING HAS turned away some deliveries

PICTURE: UNITE NW

industrial relations and end the victimisation and bullying culture that has been so corrosive at its Portal Way depot.

"However, DHL needs to be fully aware that if it fails to honour its promises then Unite will not allow its members to be mistreated.

"It will consider all avenues to protect them including fresh industrial action."

Rowe told Socialist Worker last week that the 120-strong

workforce has "stayed strong" and that DHL "underestimate the resolution of our members to ballot again".

The improvement on what was originally offered is the result of powerful workers' action.

It shows militancy wins change.

But more strikes could have won a firmer commitment from DHL about changing management's bullying culture.

This dispute should have ended with some managers sacked, not corporate waffle about change.

Unite must be ready to take DHL on again should the company fail to uphold its commitment.

Throughout the dispute DHL workers showed their strength.

They need to continue to fight against attacks by management whenever they arise.

## CIVIL SERVICE WORKERS

# It's time to use Section 44 at the DVLA in Swansea

HUNDREDS OF workers in a dangerously overcrowded government workplace in Swansea met last week after threatening to strike.

Around 2,000 people from Swansea and the surrounding area are currently made to come into work at the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency office. More than 500 have caught coronavirus since September.

Workers were expecting their bosses to back down and allow most of them to work from home after the scandal hit the headlines last month.

## Strike

Some 88 percent of those who replied said they were prepared to strike in a poll run by their PCS union.

Instead bosses have only offered a review.

One worker told Socialist Worker, "We want nothing but a skeleton crew on site immediately."

"The Department for Transport put out a statement that said reducing the number of staff on site will have no impact on the number of cases on site."

"It beggars belief. All the advice the government has put out about staying at home and social distancing, they're saying the DVLA can ignore it and it will have no impact."

The PCS says it is "highly

likely" to call a strike ballot.

It is also offering support to anyone who wants to leave the workplace on safety grounds under Section 44 of the Employment Rights Act.

But the union fears it will be taken to court if it advises workers to do this collectively.

The union has to prepare to defy any threats and encourage workers to use Section 44.

■ **PRIVATISED** security workers in the Courts and Tribunals Service have voted to strike over pay.

The members of the PCS union want bosses at outsourcer OCS to pay them a living wage.

Workers are currently paid a maximum of £8.85 an hour.

It comes as the PCS is also asking Courts and Tribunals workers if they are prepared to strike to force workplace closures on safety grounds.

■ **WORKERS** IN HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) are voting on whether to accept a pay deal between bosses and their union PCS.

The offer includes an average pay rise of 13 percent over three years, but means accepting detrimental changes to working conditions for some workers.

Building support for a strike is the only way to win a better deal.

## ROUND-UP

# Fighting against fire and rehire at Heathrow airport

**WORKERS** AT Heathrow Airport Limited (HAL) struck on Friday of last week and planned further strikes on Tuesday and Saturday this week.

Further action is set for 16 and 18 February.

The bitter dispute is over the company's decision to fire and rehire its entire workforce to ram through inferior wages and conditions.

Workers, who are in the Unite union, previously struck for four days in December.

The decision to fire and rehire its workforce will see HAL workers' pay cut by up to 25 percent—up to £8,000 per year.

Workers on strike include firefighters, engineers, security, baggage operations, central terminal operations, landside and airside operations.

■ **SCAFFOLDERS** at the British Steel plant in Scunthorpe began a 48-hour strike on Monday.

The Unite union members are then set to walk out for 48 hours on 15 February and for a further 24 hours on 18 February.

The 50 scaffolders are employed by contractor Brand Energy.

■ **SECURITY STAFF** at the Royal Berkshire Hospital in Reading were set to strike from Monday to Friday this week over pay. They work for Kingdom Services Group Ltd.

The 20 security guards, in the Unite union, have been striking since mid-December. Bosses have refused to offer more than £9.30 for security officers, who are fighting for an increase to £12 an hour.

## NHS

# Carlisle NHS pay fightback

AROUND 150 porters, cleaners and switchboard workers at Carlisle's Cumberland Infirmary are preparing to strike.

The Unison and GMB union members are angry after being repeatedly denied promised pay enhancements for working unsocial hours.

NHS privatisation means the workers have passed to new employers on a number of occasions.

They were recently transferred to Mitie.

"Our members at the hospital feel utterly devalued," said Unison regional organiser David Atkinson.

The first 24-hour strike will begin on Friday 26 February and will be followed by another on Monday 1 March.

● Messages of support to enquiries@unisoncumbria.co.uk and follow Unison Cumbria & north lincs health branch on Facebook for updates

## UNIVERSITIES

# Brighton jobs battle settled

**WORKERS** AT Brighton university and their supporters rallied on Monday after the UCU union settled a dispute.

UCU members struck for five days last year after bosses threatened compulsory redundancies in the IT department. They were set for a five-day walkout on Monday.

A statement agreed by the UCU and university bosses said, "The dispute is resolved as the individual concerned is leaving the university voluntarily."

Most of those affected by the threat to jobs were Unison union members. Mark Abel, UCU chair at Brighton university, said, "We started in the hope that we could fight alongside Unison. We weren't able to mount a joint fight and it might have been different if we had been able to."

But he added, "Management wanted the message to go out that resistance is futile. So the fact we achieved a negotiated settlement is really important."

## PEOPLE BEFORE PROFIT



# Universal Credit protests

GROUPS OF activists across Britain staged protests as part of a national day of action last Saturday.

Campaigners demanded that the £20 uplift to Universal Credit (UC) introduced under the pandemic be retained.

They also called for a rise in other benefits too.

Protesters gathered outside job centres and in town and city centres to draw attention to the campaign.

Actions took place in Birmingham, Barnsley, Chesterfield, Harlow, Portsmouth, Cambridge, Glasgow, Lancaster (above) and many other places.

London protests included actions in

Peckham, Walthamstow, Chingford and Catford.

The day of action was backed by People Before Profit, Disabled People Against Cuts (Dpac), Homes For All Campaign, Unite union members and others.

Dpac said plans to remove the £20 uplift to UC are "particularly cruel and unnecessary".

It pointed out that people on other benefits have had no uplift.

"Many of these are disabled and their living costs have been significantly higher as a result of the pandemic and needing to shield," it said.

● Go to peoplebefore-profit.com for more information



# STRIKERS BURN BAD CONTRACTS

by SOPHIE SQUIRE

**BRITISH GAS workers burned their new, worse contracts at the weekend, as they took to the picket lines.**

Over 7,000 British Gas strikers took their 15th day of strikes this year on Sunday.

The GMB union members are fighting plans from parent company Centrica to fire and rehire workers on worse pay and conditions.

Alex—who has worked for British Gas for two decades—told Socialist Worker that bosses are resorting to dirty tactics to try to undermine the strike.

“The company is continually playing games,” he said.

“We received an email yesterday of how much money they are deducting from our next pay cheque.

## Delaying

“They are also delaying payroll until the 8 February to deduct as much as possible. We have also been told that we can’t get overtime.”

And Alex added that the way in which workers



PICKETING HAS maintained the momentum of the strike

PICTURE: GMB

are organised makes unity difficult.

“Working with British Gas now is quite a lonely job. We used to be on the same teams for years but now we get

changed every 18 months.”

“I have joined two teams where I never met my colleagues. This is the company’s attempt to divide and conquer.”

British Gas has tried to blame the new terms and conditions on workers not being productive enough.

It’s an obvious bid to take advantage of the financial

crisis caused by the pandemic. But as Alex pointed out, any change in the quality of work is down to detrimental changes that the company has made in recent years.

Labour Party politicians have said they back the strikes.

London mayor Sadiq Khan, former prime minister Gordon Brown and former Labour leader Ed Miliband have all expressed their support for workers.

But if this battle is successful it won’t be the politicians to thank.

## Prepared

It will be the thousands of workers who have been prepared to strike repeatedly to win their demands.

The latest round of action ends on Monday.

The GMB has announced a further three lots of four-day strikes beginning on Friday of this week, Friday of next week and Friday 26 February.

If British Gas doesn’t give in to strikers’ demands workers should push for indefinite action to make it clear to bosses everywhere that fire and rehire will be met with a fight.

## More online

‘I can’t walk away from this fight’ [bit.ly/BG-walk](https://bit.ly/BG-walk)

## PAY FIGHT

## ‘We won’t just roll over’ say strikers at Sage care home in north London

SAGE CARE home workers in Golders Green, north London, staged lively picket lines on Saturday.

It marked their sixth day of strikes for £12 an hour pay, the same terms and conditions as NHS workers and recognition for their chosen UVW union.

Despite Tory restrictions on the right to protest, workers still managed to create an atmosphere on the quiet street in north London. Organisers said that this was their biggest picket yet.

Striker, Helen, described almost two decades of poverty pay. “I’ve been a care assistant



A NOISY picket line on Saturday

PICTURE: GUY SMALLMAN

for 19 years,” she told Socialist Worker.

“In that time I’ve only received a pay rise of £3.

“I worked it out and that’s 16p a year. This is just awful when the cost of living has just gone up and up.

“London is an expensive city to live in and we need a decent pay rise to live and to be able to pay our bills.”

All the workers pointed out that they’ve put their lives on the line in order to work during a pandemic.

“We’ve been treated terribly all through the virus despite being key workers,” she told Socialist

Worker. “Every single time they needed us at the care home during lockdown—whether we were on or off duty—we were there.

“We’ve watched people die and suffer from coronavirus, which has not been good to see.”

On the pickets, workers held banners that read, “Time for £12,” and, “Don’t cross the picket line.”

When a passer-by belittled the strikers for asking for better pay, one worker hit back.

“They just expect us to just roll over and take what we’re given,” the strike said. “But we won’t.

We will keep fighting.”

Striker Andrene added that their fight isn’t just about the workers at Sage.

“Workers like us, especially migrant workers, are treated as less,” she said.

“We joined the union because we want to be treated with respect and dignity.

“And we want to send a message to everyone that you too can join the fightback.”

Every trade unionist should get behind the Sage workers’ fight.

Donate to their strike fund at [bit.ly/sagecarehomefund](https://bit.ly/sagecarehomefund)